PATTERNS
OF
POWER

The Ibadat Khana and the Mahzar

Akbar, the Ulama, and the Authority to Decide

1575 — 1579 — 1690

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with Claude (Anthropic)

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Held as tested, not revealed.
A case study in the Patterns of Power series.

Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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PREFACE AND OUTLINE

Front matter · how this study was made, the disciplines it holds itself to, and a map of its fourteen parts

The collaboration

This is a case study in the Patterns of Power series, applying the series' framework to the religious politics of Akbar's reign — from the building of the *ʿIbādat Khāna* at Fatehpur Sikri in 1575, through the *khuṭba* he read himself in June 1579 and the *maḥẓar* his scholars signed that September, to the discipleship of 1582 and its undoing a century later. The framework is a lens for reading how any order of power is founded, dressed and held: the floor of force beneath every order, the robe of doctrine laid over the floor to make the force cheap, the settlement that divides the spoils, the cost column in which each subject prices defection, the seam through which a people's beliefs are managed, the default by which an elite coordinates without instruction, and — running under all of it — position logic, the proposition that rulers in like positions converge on like answers because a position poses a problem with only a few good solutions.

The study was built one module at a time. The author brought the framework, the direction and the judgement of the whole; Claude, Anthropic's model, did the research — verifying load-bearing quotations, dates and figures by search before any module was written — and produced the drafts. Where the research contradicted the framework's expectation, the research was followed.

What this case isolates

This is the third study in a sequence and it completes an argument the first two could not finish.

The Seljuk study found a conquest dynasty that spent enormous sums on the premises, payroll and prestige of an interpretive class and never acquired its certification, because the Islamic licence to teach and give legal opinions passes from one named master to one named student on no formal criteria, by a grant nobody can

compel. The Investiture study found a Latin credential lodged in an office instead — a priest made by a bishop, a bishop by bishops — and therefore capturable, and therefore worth fifty years of war.

That pair isolated one variable: **where the credential lives.** This case isolates a second, and the second turns out to be independent of the first.

Akbar faced the same uncapturable personal licence that defeated Nizām al-Mulk. But the Indian *'ulamā'* were not funded as the Seljuk *'ulamā'* were. They lived on *madad-i maʿāsh*: the revenue of specified lands, granted by an imperial officer, ordinarily for the grantee's lifetime, with heirs applying for renewal. That is not a *waqf*. A *waqf* is a private perpetual endowment which no ruler can quietly close. A *madad-i maʿāsh* grant is a state pension.

Nizām al-Mulk could neither license his scholars nor starve them. Akbar could not license them and could starve them — and he did, through five years of survey, re-measurement, ceilings, and an order that every holder of more than five hundred *bīghas* bring his patent to court in person. Everything in this study follows from that one difference.

There is also a configuration no previous case in the collection has had. The Seljuks and their subjects shared a faith; the emperor and the pope shared a faith. Akbar's dynasty was Muslim and the great majority of his subjects were not. A ruler in that position cannot make his rule cheap by borrowing his subjects' doctrine, and his options reduce to three: govern as an occupier, adopt his subjects' faith, or construct a language above both that neither community's clergy owns. He attempted the third, and *ṣulḥ-i kull* is what it looks like.

And the case supplies the sequence's test of a proposition the first two studies could only approach. **Can a ruler be his own source of title?** Akbar had every advantage required — no rival authority in existence, an army, an administration, a court theologian with a doctrine of divine light, a poet laureate to versify it. The answer this study reaches is set out in Module 8 and it turns on a single formal fact: the document of September 1579 is not a *farmān* but a *maḥẓar*, an attestation in which other men declare, in the first person plural, that the emperor's judgement binds them. He could not author it himself. Nobody can.

The problem of the sources

The evidentiary position here is unusually good and unusually narrow at once.

Two great narratives survive from the same court, written by men who knew each other. Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnāma* and *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* are the official record, written at the emperor's command, by his closest counsellor, to establish him as the perfect sovereign

of the age. ʿAbd al-Qādir Badauni's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* was written in secret by a scholar on an imperial grant who regarded the whole direction of policy as apostasy, and was not published in his lifetime. Beveridge's, Blochmann's, Jarrett's and Lowe's translations are all out of copyright and are used here.

The pair produces the cleanest information asymmetry in the collection, and it corrects a standard caution. Official histories are usually to be discounted for flattery. **This one distorts by ambition instead.** The full text of the *maḥẓar* is preserved by Badauni and by Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad; Abu'l Fazl, whose entire project was the exaltation of imperial sovereignty, does not give it — and his summary widens the emperor's arbitral role from disagreements among *mujtahids* to disputes among sects and religions, which is not what the document says. He declined to quote a text he found too narrow and improved it. A study working only from the court source would overstate the imperial claim, which is the opposite of the error one expects.

Two further cautions run through the study. Badauni is a hostile witness with a declared grievance, and where the argument rests on his testimony the text says so. And the record as a whole was produced almost entirely by men on the imperial payroll — Badauni included, since he held a grant and worked in the translation bureau — so the surviving debate is a quarrel between two courtiers about their emperor's soul, in which the majority of his subjects do not appear as agents at all.

No figures are given anywhere in this study for populations, revenues, army sizes, famine mortality or casualties, except where a chronicle figure is quoted as a chronicle figure and marked as an order of magnitude.

The disciplines

Five rules govern every module.

Quotation. Public-domain primary sources are quoted exactly, because in a legal instrument the precise words are the argument. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased briefly and credited.

No fabrication. No quotation, date, attribution or figure is invented or reconstructed from memory. Contested points are flagged as contested: the date of the abolition of *jizya*, the identification of the *ʿIbādat Khāna*'s site, the extent of Sirhindī's later influence, and the circumstances of ʿAbd al-Nabī's death are all left open, because they are open.

Gravity without partisanship. Neither the emperor nor the scholars are flattered or demonised. Chittor and the *Razmnāma* belong in the same account.

Legibility is not pardon. Explaining how a ruler made his authority lawful is the opposite of excusing it.

Held as tested, not revealed. The pattern is a tendency, never a law.

What this case added to the framework

The central contribution is the two-lever analysis set out in Module 12: that the **location of a credential** (in an office or in a person) and the **form of its funding** (perpetual private endowment or terminable state grant) are independent

variables, and that the three cases in this sequence occupy three of the four resulting positions. Nizām al-Mulk could neither license nor starve. The Latin parties could license, which is why they fought. Akbar could starve and not license, and got compliance that lasted exactly as long as the pressure.

To which the case adds a third instrument that operates on neither lever: **where an interpretive class's credential cannot be inspected, its authority rests on an assumption that its holders know, and that assumption does not survive their public and repeated disagreement in a forum the ruler controls.** Publicity is the cheap attack, and the *ʿIbādat Khāna* is what it looks like.

Beneath that, a series of findings the case forced. That where a ruler's faith is not his subjects', he cannot borrow doctrine downward and must construct a language above both communities — and that such a language argues from the ruler's position rather than from anyone's scripture, which makes it unfalsifiable by all and confirmable by none. That a self-generated doctrine can *frame* an authority but cannot confer one, since a claim about oneself is not evidence about oneself. That a ruler who becomes his own source of title can only do so personally, and a personal authority is not transmissible — nineteen disciples died with their *pīr*. That a compelled signature cannot authorise, because the property being purchased is that the signer might have refused. That a personally licensed class can be neither captured nor committed, so that seven signatures in the capital have no purchase on the eighth man in a province. That administrative capacity is not a general quality but a specific set of verification practices — the brand, the roll, the transfer order, the summons — and that a ruler's reach over any privileged group is bounded by his reach over the ordinary population, because the instruments are the same instruments. That religious toleration, where the ruler's faith is a minority's, is a fiscal instrument before it is anything else, and the test of conviction is what happens when the arithmetic changes. That a ruler is most dangerous to the clergy of his own faith, because those are the only ones he has instruments for. And that a counter-reformation should be looked for in the tenure provisions rather than the doctrinal proclamations: everyone remembers the *jizya* of 1679, and it was the *farmān* of 1690 making the scholars' grants hereditary that permanently removed the only lever

that had ever worked.

The arc

A landscape opening and twelve modules, each with a framework function and its own title.

Landscape. *The Land of Justice and Beneficence.* A Muslim dynasty over a population that was not Muslim, an interpretive class living on grants the emperor could audit, and no caliph within reach to buy a title from.

1 — The Floor of Force. *The Brand on the Horse.* A boy of thirteen with a regent, a fortress where thirty thousand were killed, an aristocracy of ranked servants, and the audit that nearly cost the emperor his eastern provinces.

2 — The Settlement. *Nothing Passes to the Son.* An aristocracy of rank rather than blood, the one hereditary exception granted to the men who could not be conquered, and the pension fund that turned out to be a lever.

3 — The Robe. *He Read the Khutba Himself.* A light descending through a Mongol ancestress, a Friday sermon composed by the emperor's own poet, and the discovery that a man who authors his own title can only do it in person.

4 — Formation. *The Night of Illumination.* A building erected so that learned men could disagree in front of the emperor, and the disagreement that turned out to be the instrument.

5 — The Cost Column. *Bring Your Patent in Person.* An empire that never had to buy its subjects' belief, a scholar class made to apply for its own income, and two chief scholars sent on pilgrimage with orders not to come back.

6 — Extraction. *Ten Years of Prices.* A revenue system built out of measurement and averages, why it mattered more than any doctrine, and the tax that was abolished twice.

7 — Information and Suppression. *He Omitted the Text.* The official history and the secret one, a document quoted by the enemy and paraphrased by the friend, and what the paraphrase widened.

8 — Elite Coordination and the Default. *We Do Hereby Agree That It Shall Be Binding on Us.* A document in the wrong grammar, signed by the men it disarmed, and the provincial judge who overturned it within nine months.

9 — Plurality or Foreclosure. *Man Singh Declined.* A general who refused the emperor's discipleship and lost nothing, and the line below which none of it reached.

10 — Change and Collapse. *Hereditary by Farman.* Nineteen disciples and no successor, a son who had the historian murdered, and a great-grandson who undid the settlement by changing the terms of a land grant.

11 — The Grim Accounting. *Thirty Thousand at Chittor.* A ledger whose two columns were written by the same hand in the same decade.

12 — Convergence and Divergence. *The Third Answer.* Three rulers, one problem, two levers — and the strongest case for Akbar, stated fully and answered.

LANDSCAPE

THE LAND OF JUSTICE AND BENEFICENCE

Landscape · the order on the eve — a Muslim dynasty over a population that was not Muslim, an interpretive class living on grants the emperor could audit, and no caliph within reach to buy a title from

The order that was already there

Begin with the recursion, and here it runs deeper than in any case this series has examined.

The Islamic political order Akbar inherited in India was itself a naturalised conquest three and a half centuries old. Turkish and Afghan armies had taken the Gangetic plain at the end of the twelfth century; the Delhi Sultanate had held it, in one dynasty or another, from 1206; by the time Babur destroyed the last of the Lodis at Panipat in 1526 there had been Muslim rule at Delhi for over three hundred years, and the *'ulamā'*, the *qāḍī*s, the Persian chancery language and the Islamic legal framework of the ruling stratum were simply the furniture of governance.

Beneath that lay an older stack again. The Rajput houses whose alliance Akbar would buy traced dynastic descent through centuries; the Brahmanical order they patronised was older still; and the sub-continental record of one armed elite overlaying another and being absorbed into the categories of the order it conquered runs back beyond the point where it can be traced.

But one thing distinguishes this case from every other in the collection, and it changes the shape of everything. In the eleventh-century Seljuk empire the conqueror and the conquered shared a faith. In Latin Christendom the emperor and the pope shared a faith. Here the ruling house was Sunni Muslim and the overwhelming majority of the people it ruled were not — they were Hindus, with Jains, Sikhs in the making, Zoroastrians on the Gujarat coast, Jews, and Christians of the Malabar and now of the Portuguese settlements.

No reliable figures survive and none is offered here. What is not in doubt is the order of magnitude: the Muslim population of Akbar's territories was a minority,

concentrated in the towns, the army and the administration, and in some regions substantial and in most very small.

That fact removes an option every other case in this collection had. **A conqueror who shares his subjects' religion can make his rule cheap by borrowing their doctrine.** The Seljuks did exactly that; so, in its way, did the Latin empire. Akbar could not. The doctrine his own class held was the doctrine of a minority, and using it to legitimate his rule to the majority was not merely ineffective but actively hostile — since in its ordinary application it made most of his subjects a tolerated inferior category paying a poll tax for the privilege of not being Muslim.

So the problem of this case is stated before it begins: a ruler whose own faith cannot be used to make his rule feel owed by most of the people he rules.

The men who held the law

The Islamic interpretive class of sixteenth-century India was numerous, learned and — this is the fact that decides the whole case — **financially dependent on the state in a form the state could reach.**

They lived, in large part, on *madad-i maʿāsh*: grants of the revenue of specified lands, made to scholars, Sufis, sayyids, widows and the deserving poor, administered by a department under an officer called the *ṣadr al-ṣudūr*. The recipient held no right in the soil, only the assessed revenue of it. The grant was ordinarily for the grantee's lifetime, and the heirs had to apply for renewal.

Set that beside the instrument the Seljuk case examined and the difference is the whole difference. **A *waqf* is a perpetual endowment created by a private founder, alienated in perpetuity, its terms fixed in a deed, administered under a judge's supervision, and defundable only by a conspicuous public act of expropriation. A *madad-i maʿāsh* grant is a state pension in the form of land revenue, made by an imperial officer, for a life, renewable at the pleasure of the man who made it.**

That is the lever Akbar had and Nizām al-Mulk did not. It does not mean the Indian *ʿulamāʾ* were servile — they were not, and this study will show them declaring rebellion against him lawful. It means their money was reachable.

Two men held the commanding heights of that establishment. Shaikh ʿAbd al-Nabī had been *ṣadr al-ṣudūr* since 1565 and, in Badauni's phrase, no *ṣadr* in the reign of any monarch had ever been so powerful — he distributed enormous areas of land. ʿAbdullah Sultanpuri held the title Makhdūm al-Mulk. The two were openly hostile to one another, and the record of their conduct that reached the emperor included allegations of bribery in the confirmation of grants and, in Sultanpuri's case, the repeated transfer of his property to his wife each year to avoid paying the alms-tax on it.

The interpretive class Akbar inherited was disunited at the top, rich, and paid out of a fund he controlled.

No caliph to buy from

And now the absence that shapes everything else.

The Seljuk sultans had an Abbasid caliph in Baghdad — an office of authorisation that no armed man could occupy, whose endorsement was therefore worth buying, and which they spent twenty-five years and a hundred thousand dinars obtaining. Henry IV had a pope, whose authorisation he wanted so badly that when he could not get it he manufactured a rival.

Akbar had nobody.

The Abbasid line had ended at Baghdad in 1258 and its Cairo remnant had been absorbed by the Ottomans. The Ottoman sultan's claim to a caliphate was distant, contested, and belonged to a rival empire; there is no serious evidence that Akbar sought or valued it. The Safavids to the west were Shīʿī and were an enemy. The Indian *ʿulamāʾ* were not an office and could not confer a title; they were a class, and a divided one.

There was, in short, no external author of title available to the Mughal emperor at any price. The Mughals had for some time simply used the vocabulary themselves — styling the emperor *khalīfa* and the realm the caliphate — which is exactly what a ruler does when there is nobody to buy the word from.

That leaves a ruler with three options and no fourth. He can rule on force alone, which is expensive and brittle. He can submit to the interpretive class he has, which means governing a majority-Hindu empire by the law of a minority. Or he can attempt the thing both other cases in this series suggest is fatal: **become the author himself.**

The eight years this study examines are the record of a man working through all three.

The state of the doctrine

One more condition, and it is the same one the two preceding studies found and should now be recognised as a recurring shape rather than a coincidence.

Islamic belief among Akbar's Muslim subjects was old, deep and universal in the ordinary way. What was not settled was almost everything else. The four schools of law existed and disagreed; the *ʿulamāʾ* of Hindustan disagreed among themselves on matters as basic as how many wives a man might lawfully have; Sufi orders — the

Chishtīs to whom Akbar's own family was devoted, the Naqshbandīs who would produce his fiercest critics — held incompatible views of the relation between mystical experience and the law; Mahdawī movements had been persecuted within living memory; and the Islamic millennium was approaching, with the year 1000 of the Hijra falling in 1591–92, which meant that a very large number of people expected something.

And this time the unsettledness was not merely a background condition. It was the emperor's opportunity, and he built a building to display it.

Reading the eve against the framework

On the recursion. The Islamic order in India was a former conquest naturalised across three centuries, laid over older orders naturalised across longer ones — the ordinary condition. What is not ordinary is the incompleteness. Three hundred years of Muslim rule had produced a Muslim ruling stratum and had not produced a Muslim population, and that gap is the case.

Which yields the contribution, and it is a configuration this collection has not previously had to handle. Every case examined so far has assumed that the doctrine a ruler borrows to make his force cheap is a doctrine his subjects already hold. That assumption fails here and its failure is instructive.

Where a ruler's own faith is not his subjects' faith, he cannot make his rule cheap by borrowing downward, and his available moves reduce to three: govern as an occupier and pay for it in force; adopt his subjects' doctrine and lose his own class; or construct a language above both that neither community's clergy owns. The first is what most conquest regimes in this position have done. The second is very rare and generally fatal to the ruling stratum. The third is what Akbar attempted, and this study is an examination of whether it can be done and what it costs.

And a second observation, on where the interpretive class's money sits. The Seljuk case found that a state could buy an interpretive class's premises and payroll and never own its certification, because the licence ran person to person. That remains true here — the Indian *'ulamā'* were licensed the same way, master to student, and Akbar could no more issue an *ijāza* than Nizām al-Mulk could.

But the funding was differently constructed, and the difference matters as much as the licence. **A class endowed in perpetuity by private founders and a class pensioned for life by an imperial officer are equally unlicensable by the ruler and very unequally starvable.** Where the money is a state grant with a term, the ruler holds a lever over the men whose certification he cannot touch — and what he can do with that lever, and what it does not buy him, is much of what follows.

A note on sources.

No population figures are given for the religious composition of Akbar's empire, because none of the sixteenth-century material supports them and modern estimates vary too widely to be quoted as fact; only the order of magnitude — a Muslim minority concentrated in towns, army and administration — is relied on, and it is not disputed.

The character of *madad-i maʿāsh* and *suyūrghāl* grants — revenue of specified lands rather than rights in the soil, ordinarily for the grantee's lifetime, heirs applying for renewal, administered under the *ṣadr al-ṣudūr* — follows the standard administrative literature and Abu'l Fazl's own account in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* of the categories of recipient and the distinction between cash allowances (*wazīfa*) and land grants. The comparison with the Islamic *waqf* is drawn from the preceding study in this series and the inference from the difference is this study's.

ʿAbd al-Nabī's tenure as *ṣadr* from 1565 and Badauni's judgement that no *ṣadr* had ever been so powerful are as reported in Badauni's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*; W. H. Lowe's translation of the second volume (1884) is out of copyright. The allegations against Makhdūm al-Mulk regarding the annual transfer of property to his wife to avoid *zakāt*, and against the *ṣadr*'s department regarding bribery, come through Badauni and other hostile channels and are reported here as accusations that reached the emperor rather than as established facts.

The end of the Abbasid caliphate at Baghdad in 1258 and the absorption of its Cairo remnant by the Ottomans are standard. That Mughal rulers styled themselves *khalīfa* and their realm a caliphate is attested in the chancery vocabulary; the study makes no claim that Akbar sought Ottoman recognition, and notes only the absence of an external authorising office rather than asserting a documented refusal of one.

The Islamic millennium falling in 1591–92 and the millennial expectation surrounding it are standard; the commissioning of the *Tārīkh-i Alfī*, the millennial history, belongs to this period and is treated later.

MODULE 1

THE BRAND ON THE HORSE

Module 1 · the floor of force — a boy of thirteen with a regent, a fortress where thirty thousand were killed, an army of ranked servants none of whom could pass his rank to a son, and the audit that nearly cost the emperor his eastern provinces

The inheritance

Akbar came to a throne that barely existed. His grandfather Babur had won northern India at Panipat in 1526 and died four years later; his father Humayun had lost the whole of it to Sher Shah Sur and spent fifteen years in exile in Persia and Afghanistan before recovering Delhi in 1555, and then died within months by falling down the steps of his library. Akbar was thirteen. He was proclaimed at Kalanaur in February 1556, and in November of that year his regent Bairam Khan won the second battle of Panipat against the Hindu general Hemu, who had taken Delhi and Agra and had himself proclaimed *Vikramaditya*.

For four years the empire was Bairam Khan's. In 1560 Akbar removed him, and there followed a further period in which power lay with the household faction around his foster-mother. He took the government fully into his own hands in 1562, at nineteen, and spent the next forty years conquering: Malwa, Gondwana, the Rajput states, Gujarat, Bihar, Bengal, Kabul, Kashmir, Sind, Orissa, and after 1595 the northern Deccan.

The floor of this order was built by a man who had inherited nothing but a claim, and who spent his entire adult life extending it by force. Any account of his religious experiments that forgets that he was, first and continuously, a conqueror at war has lost the subject.

Chittor

The character of that conquest has to be entered before anything else, because the accounts of Akbar's tolerance are written as though it were not there.

In 1567–68 he besieged Chittor, the great fortress of Mewar, whose ruler had refused the submission the other Rajput houses had accepted. The siege lasted four

months and was pressed with mines, batteries and a covered approach that cost heavily in labourers' lives. When the wall was breached and the commander killed, the defenders performed the rite of *jauhar* — the women burning themselves — and the men came out to die fighting.

Akbar then ordered a general massacre of the surviving population. The figure that comes down in the sources, including his own side's, is thirty thousand.

It is a conventional number and should be treated as an order of magnitude rather than a count. What it is not is a hostile invention: the killing was ordered, it was on that scale, and it was afterwards proclaimed as a victory over infidels in a public dispatch. **The man who would in 1579 have himself declared the arbiter of religious disputes had, eleven years earlier, put a Rajput town to the sword and announced it in the language of holy war**, and any reading of the later policy that cannot accommodate that fact is a reading of a different man.

The instrument

What Akbar built out of that war is the most interesting military-administrative machine in this collection, and its design is a single idea repeated.

Every servant of the empire, civil or military, held a *manṣab* — a numbered rank, expressed as a figure of personal standing (*ẓāt*) and, from the 1590s, a second figure for the horsemen he was to maintain (*sawār*). Rank determined pay, precedence and obligation. It was conferred by the emperor, could be raised or lowered by the emperor, and was **not heritable.** At a man's death his rank lapsed and his accumulated property was subject to escheat to the treasury.

Payment was ordinarily by *jāgīr*: the assignment of the estimated revenue of a district, calculated to match the salary owed, from which the holder maintained himself and his contingent. Jāgīrs were **transferable, and were transferred**, routinely, every few years.

Anyone who has read the preceding studies in this series will recognise the instrument. It is the *iqṭāʿ* — an assignment of assessed revenue rather than of soil, revocable, not a fief. What is new is not the design but the **enforcement**, and the enforcement is why the Mughal machine worked where the Seljuk one decayed.

The Seljuk court text of 1091 instructed that assignees be moved on every three or four years so they would not grow strong, and the instruction was a confession that they were not being moved. The Mughal state actually moved them, kept the books, and had a department to check.

Dagh and chehra

The checking is where the module's title comes from, and it is a small administrative measure that nearly cost Akbar half his empire.

A commander paid to maintain a hundred horsemen has an obvious incentive to maintain sixty and pocket the difference, and to borrow neighbours' animals on muster day. The Mughal answer, systematised from 1573–74 and taken from a Delhi Sultanate precedent, was *dāgh o chehra*: **the branding of horses with an imperial mark, and the recording of a descriptive roll of each trooper's features.** Every horse in the contingent was marked; every man was on a list; and a muster could be checked against both.

It is one of the most consequential pieces of paperwork in Indian history, because it converted a nominal obligation into an audited one and thereby made the difference between a paper army and a real one. It also enraged everybody it applied to, because it converted a customary source of income into embezzlement.

In 1580 the officers of Bengal and Bihar, pressed by a governor enforcing the branding regulations and the submission of jāgīr accounts with unusual rigour, rebelled. They killed the imperial governor at Tanda on 19 April 1580, declared for Akbar's half-brother Mirza Muhammad Hakim of Kabul, had the *khuṭba* read in his name, and distributed offices and fiefs on his behalf. Bengal and Bihar were formally out of the empire. Simultaneously Mirza Hakim advanced on Lahore with a reported fifteen thousand horse.

The rebellion that most nearly destroyed Akbar began as a dispute about accounting, and the religious grievances attached themselves to it afterwards — a sequence this study will have to keep straight, because the sources on both sides have an interest in reversing it.

Who held the swords

The composition of the officer corps is the last element, and it is a settlement decision as much as a military one.

Akbar's nobility was assembled out of four or five mutually suspicious pools: Turanis from Central Asia, Iranis from Persia, Indian Muslims including the Afghan houses he had defeated, and — from 1562, when he married a daughter of the Kachhwaha house of Amber and took her father and brother into service — **Rajputs**.

The Rajput incorporation is the structural masterstroke of the reign and it was not sentimental. It supplied cavalry of the first quality; it converted the most dangerous internal enemies into stakeholders; it gave the emperor a bloc that owed everything to him and nothing to the Turani or Irani factions; and it was purchased with something the Rajput houses valued more than money, which was the retention of their ancestral territories as *waṭan jāgīr*, held hereditarily, alongside ordinary transferable jāgīrs elsewhere.

The result is visible in the crisis of 1580–81. The forces that put down the eastern rebellion were commanded by Rājā Todar Mal. The force that stopped Mirza Hakim at Lahore was commanded by Rājā Man Singh and Rājā Bhagwan Das. **When the Muslim officer corps and a section of the *'ulamā'* rose against him in the name of Islam, the emperor was saved by his Hindu generals.**

Reading the floor against the framework

The finding, and it concerns the difference between a rule and its enforcement. The Seljuk settlement and the Mughal settlement are the same instrument: revenue assignment, revocable, not heritable, in place of a salary. The Seljuk version decayed into hereditary local power within two generations. The Mughal version held for a century and a half.

Nothing in the legal form differed. What differed was the audit. **A revocable grant is only revocable if somebody keeps the register, and the register is only worth keeping if somebody checks it against the world** — which is what branding the horses and recording the men's faces actually is. The Seljuk court prescribed rotation and could not perform it. The Mughal court performed it, and the entire difference in outcome between two identical settlements comes down to a clerk with a list and a hot iron.

Which sharpens the proposition the earlier study offered — that a grant is only as cancellable as the state's reach on the day the cancellation is attempted — into something more precise and more testable. **Administrative capacity is not a general quality of a state; it is a specific set of verification practices, and the presence or absence of those practices predicts the fate of a settlement better than the wording of its grants.** Look for the muster, the brand, the descriptive roll and the transfer order. Where they are present, expect the settlement to hold; where a manual prescribes them and no records survive of their being done, expect it to dissolve.

And the second finding, which is the cost of the same measure. Verification is not free and it is not paid for in money. It is paid for in the resentment of the men verified, because an audit converts a customary perquisite into a theft and does so

retrospectively. The Mughal state's most valuable administrative instrument produced, within seven years of its systematic introduction, the rebellion that nearly ended the reign.

Every mechanism that makes a revocable grant genuinely revocable also makes the grantee genuinely aggrieved, and the strength of a settlement and the depth of its officers' grievance are produced by the same act.

A note on sources.

Akbar's accession at Kalanaur in February 1556, the second battle of Panipat in November 1556, Bairam Khan's regency to 1560 and Akbar's assumption of full power in 1562 are standard, as is the sequence of conquests.

The siege of Chittor in 1567–68, the *jauhar*, the general massacre ordered after the breach and the figure of thirty thousand are reported across the sources including the Mughal ones; the figure is conventional and is given here as an order of magnitude. The victory dispatch proclaiming it in the language of religious war is likewise reported; the study relies on its existence and character rather than quoting it, not having verified a text reproducing the original.

The *manṣab* system with its *ẓāt* and *sawār* components, the non-heritability of rank, escheat at death, and payment by transferable *jāgīr* are standard; the *sawār* rank is generally dated to the 1590s and the study says so rather than projecting it back. The comparison with the Seljuk *iqṭā'* is drawn from the preceding study in this series.

Dāgh o chehra — the branding of horses and the recording of descriptive rolls — is standard, its systematisation conventionally dated to 1573–74, with Delhi Sultanate precedents under 'Alā' al-Dīn Khaljī. The connection between rigorous enforcement of branding and jāgīr accounts in Bengal and the rebellion of 1580 is the standard scholarly account and is followed here.

The rebellion of 1580–81: the killing of Muzaffar Khan Turbati at Tanda on 19 April 1580, the proclamation of Mirza Muhammad Hakim and the reading of the *khuṭba* in his name, the distribution of offices on his behalf, Todar Mal's command in the east, and Man Singh's and Bhagwan Das's defence against Mirza Hakim's advance on Lahore with a reported fifteen thousand horse, follow the narrative sources and the standard accounts. The figure of fifteen thousand is a chronicle figure and is not independently supported.

The Rajput alliance from 1562 and the institution of *waṭan jāgīr* held hereditarily alongside transferable assignments are standard. No figures are given for the ethnic composition of the nobility at any date, because the surviving lists support scholarly reconstructions rather than counts.

MODULE 2

NOTHING PASSES TO THE SON

Module 2 · the settlement — an aristocracy of rank rather than blood, the one exception made for the men who could not be conquered, and the pension fund that turned out to be a lever

The rule

The Mughal settlement is one sentence long and everything else is a consequence of it.

Nothing passes to the son.

A *manṣabdār*'s rank died with him. His *jāgīr* was an assignment against a salary and reverted when the salary stopped. His accumulated wealth was subject to escheat, the treasury taking the estate and settling the deceased's debts to the crown before releasing what remained. His son might be given a rank of his own — very often was, since the emperor needed the family's service and its following — but it was a fresh grant, at whatever figure the emperor chose, and it was as revocable as his father's had been.

Compare that with what every other conquest elite in this series was doing at the same moment. The Seljuk *iqṭāʿ* was designed to be revocable and drifted into hereditary local power within two generations because nobody enforced it. The German bishoprics were deliberately given to celibate men precisely so that they could not become hereditary, and even so the reform had to fight a century to stop the church's lands sliding into families.

The Mughals achieved by administration what the Germans achieved by celibacy and the Seljuks failed to achieve at all: **a service aristocracy that could not convert its position into a lineage.**

The consequences are exactly what one would predict. The nobility was intensely loyal to the person of the emperor, because everything each man held came from him and lapsed without him. It was intensely competitive, because rank was the only currency and the emperor set it. It was culturally cosmopolitan, because talent was recruited from Transoxiana, Persia, Afghanistan and India and there was no closed caste to defend. And it had **no independent base whatever** — which is why the Mughal state could survive an aristocratic rebellion in a way that neither of the earlier cases could.

The exception

One group was exempted, and the exemption is the most instructive item in the settlement.

The Rajput houses that entered Mughal service from 1562 kept their ancestral kingdoms as *waṭan jāgīr* — homeland assignments, held hereditarily, not transferable, not subject to the ordinary rotation. A Kachhwaha of Amber served as a *manṣabdār* with transferable jāgīrs like anybody else, and Amber remained his family's.

Read that as a price and it tells you exactly what was being bought. **The one thing the Mughal settlement refused to everyone was granted to the Rajputs alone, which means the Rajputs were the one constituency the emperor could not obtain on the ordinary terms.** They held defensible hill country, they had traditions of resistance that made conquest expensive — Chittor had cost four months and a massacre — and their houses were older than the dynasty asking for submission. What they would not sell was the land their identity was made of, and Akbar did not ask them to.

In exchange he got what no other Mughal instrument could have produced: the best cavalry in India, a bloc of commanders with no stake in any Muslim faction, and — as 1581 demonstrated — an army that would fight for him when a section of the *ʿulamāʾ* declared war against him lawful.

A settlement's exceptions map its author's weaknesses more accurately than its rules map his strength.

The other grant

Beneath the service settlement sat a second and much smaller flow, and it is the one this study is really about.

Madad-i maʿāsh — aid for subsistence — was the assignment of the revenue of specified land to men who performed no service: scholars, Sufis, sayyids, the aged, widows, the learned poor. It conveyed no right in the soil, only the revenue. It was administered by the *ṣadr al-ṣudūr* and his provincial deputies. And, critically, **it was ordinarily granted for the lifetime of the grantee, with heirs required to apply for renewal.**

This is the Mughal analogue of the *waqf*, and it is not the same instrument at all.

A *waqf* is created by a private founder out of his own property, alienated to a purpose in perpetuity, its terms fixed in a deed that binds his successors and himself, supervised by a judge. Its whole design is to place a stream of income beyond anybody's

later discretion — which is why the endowed colleges of the Seljuk empire could not be quietly defunded and why their professors could tell a vizier's chief scholar to go away.

A *madad-i maʿāsh* grant is made by the state, out of the state's revenue, to a named person, for that person's life. **It is a pension.**

Akbar did with it what any ruler holding such a lever eventually does. He audited it.

Five hundred bighas

The audit ran through the 1570s and it escalated.

Grants held by Afghans and by rural notables were resumed to the crown lands. Boundaries that had been encroached upon were re-measured and consolidated. Shaikh Farid Bukhari was sent to examine the grants at Gohana in 1577; similar enquiries were made at Sirhind and elsewhere; and Badauni records that the *ṣadr*'s own administration was found to have been implicated in bribery.

Then the measure that made it personal. **Every holder of more than five hundred *bīghas* was ordered to bring his patent and present it to the emperor in person, on pain of losing the land.** Later a ceiling of a hundred *bīghas* was set on new grants, with the policy of granting half cultivable and half waste so that the grantee had to improve it.

Consider what that order does. It removes the *ṣadr* from between the emperor and the beneficiary. It converts a permanent-feeling entitlement into a licence requiring periodic re-application. It requires a scholar to travel to court and stand before the throne holding a piece of paper. And it makes clear to every recipient, in the plainest possible way, who the grant comes from.

Nothing in that programme touched a single point of Islamic law. It was entirely a matter of registers, measurement and patents — and it did more to establish the emperor's ascendancy over the interpretive class than any doctrine ever did.

The class knew it. When the eastern provinces rose in 1580, the *qāḍī* of Bengal declared the rebellion to be divine vengeance for the depriving of the *'ulamā'* of their *madad-i maʿāsh*.

Reading the settlement against the framework

The finding, and it identifies a second lever the collection had not separated out. The Seljuk study established that a state cannot capture an interpretive class whose licence passes person to person, and concluded that funding buys patronage rather than ownership. That is right as far as it goes, and it stopped one step short.

The licence and the funding are two independent variables, and a ruler's position depends on both. Where the licence is institutional the class can be captured outright, as the Latin case shows. Where the licence is personal it cannot be captured at any price. But *within* the personal-licence case, the form of the funding decides whether the ruler can starve the class — and a perpetual endowment created by private founders and a lifetime pension granted by a state officer are as different as two funding forms can be.

So the two cases separate cleanly on a variable neither could have isolated alone. **Nizām al-Mulk could not license the *'ulamā'* and could not starve them. Akbar could not license them and could starve them.** The first produced a state that funded an interpretive class into permanent independence. The second produced a state whose interpretive class signed whatever was put in front of it in 1579 and declared rebellion lawful in 1580 — which is what a starved class does, and is not at all the same as an owned one.

Which yields the general proposition: a class that can be defunded but not licensed will comply while the money is withheld and will neither be converted nor destroyed, and its compliance is therefore worth exactly as long as the pressure lasts. That is a prediction about the reversal, and the reversal, when it comes a century later, arrives by exactly the route the proposition implies.

And the smaller finding, from the exception. The one hereditary tenure in a settlement built entirely on non-heritability was granted to the Rajputs, and it marks the boundary of what the emperor's ordinary instruments could reach. Read any settlement's exceptions as a map of its author's inability. The rule tells you what he could impose; the exception tells you whom he could not.

A note on sources.

The *manṣab* system, the non-heritability of rank, escheat at death, and payment by transferable *jāgīr* are standard, as is the practice of granting sons ranks of their own as fresh grants. No figures are given for the number of *manṣabdār*s at any rank or date, because the surviving lists are partial and the scholarly reconstructions vary.

Waṭan jāgīr held hereditarily by Rajput houses alongside ordinary transferable assignments is standard, as is the alliance from 1562. The reading of the exception as a price paid for a constituency obtainable on no other terms is this study's.

On *madad-i maʿāsh*: that it conveyed the assessed revenue rather than rights in the soil, that it was ordinarily for the grantee's lifetime with heirs applying for renewal, and that it was administered by the *ṣadr al-ṣudūr*, follow the standard administrative

literature and Abu'l Fazl's account in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*. The comparison with the *waqf* is drawn from the preceding study in this series; the inference that licence-form and funding-form are independent variables is this study's.

The audit measures — resumption of grants held by Afghans and rural notables, re-measurement and consolidation of encroached boundaries, the enquiry at Gohana under Shaikh Farid Bukhari in 1577 and comparable enquiries at Sirhind, the order that holders of more than five hundred *bīghas* present their patents personally on pain of forfeiture, and the later ceiling of a hundred *bīghas* with half cultivable and half waste — are reported in Badauni and in the administrative literature. The allegations of bribery in the *ṣadr*'s department come through Badauni, who is hostile to the whole direction of policy while also hostile to ʿAbd al-Nabī personally, and are reported as his account.

The *qāḍī* of Bengal's declaration that the rebellion of 1580 was divine vengeance for the deprivation of *madad-i maʿāsh* is reported in the narrative sources and is the standard account; it is the pivot of this module's argument and is flagged as resting on that testimony.

MODULE 3

HE READ THE KHUTBA HIMSELF

Module 3 · the robe — a light descending through a Mongol ancestress, a Friday sermon in the emperor's own name composed by his poet laureate, and the discovery that a man who authors his own title can only do it in person

The problem restated

A ruler needs somebody who is not himself to say that his rule is lawful. That is the finding both preceding studies in this series converged on from opposite directions: the value of an authorisation is a property of its issuer, namely that the beneficiary could not have produced it, and no amount of force can manufacture that property because the property *is* the absence of force in its production.

Akbar had no such issuer. There was no caliph within reach, the *'ulamā'* were a divided class rather than an office, and the majority of his subjects held no doctrine in which any Islamic authorisation meant anything at all.

So the question this module asks is what a ruler does when the position that ought to authorise him is empty — and the answer, worked out at Fatehpur Sikri between 1575 and 1582, is more interesting than "he declares himself infallible," which is what he is usually said to have done and is not what happened.

The light

The doctrinal apparatus was built by Abu'l Fazl ibn Mubarak, who entered Akbar's service in 1574, became his closest counsellor, and wrote the *Akbarnāma* and the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* — the official history and the administrative gazetteer that together are the regime's account of itself.

Its central proposition is that sovereignty is a light. Kingship, in Abu'l Fazl's formulation, is a radiance emanating from God — *farr-i īzadī*, the divine effulgence of Persian imperial theory — descending upon the person of the ruler without human intermediary, and manifesting in him as justice, discernment and an ability to see truth where his subjects see only their own sects.

Two things about that construction deserve attention.

It is not Islamic in origin. *Farr* is Sasanian, pre-Islamic, Iranian imperial doctrine, and Abu'l Fazl deploys it without apology. He supplements it with a Timurid-Mongol genealogy in which the dynasty descends from Alanquwa, the ancestress impregnated by a beam of light — an origin story of exactly the same kind, in a different tradition.

And it requires no clergy of any faith to confer it. That is the point. A light that descends directly on a person cannot be granted by a *qāḍī*, withheld by a *ṣadr*, refused by a Brahman or conferred by a pope. It arrives, and the only evidence for it is the ruler's conduct.

Set that beside the *Dictatus papae*'s first proposition — that the Roman church was founded by God alone — and the structural identity is exact. **Both documents are attempts to establish that the authority in question has no human author, because an authority with a human author can be revoked by him.** The difference is that Gregory was asserting it of an office with a thousand-year institutional history and Abu'l Fazl was asserting it of a living man.

Sulh-i kull

The second element is the one that made the first usable in a country of many faiths.

Ṣulḥ-i kull — peace with all, or universal conciliation — holds that the sovereign, as the recipient of a light that comes from the source of all things, cannot take a side among the sects of his subjects. He stands above the confessional disputes of the realm not because he is indifferent to truth but because his position gives him a view none of the disputants has.

That doctrine does an enormous amount of work at once. It converts the emperor's inability to legitimate himself from a minority faith into a virtue. It gives Hindu, Jain and Zoroastrian subjects a place in the order that is not the tolerated inferiority of the *dhimmī*. It supplies the theoretical basis for the abolition of the pilgrim tax and the *jizya*. And it justifies exactly the arrangement the emperor needed, in which the interpretive class of every community is a party to a dispute and the emperor alone is not.

It is also, and this should be said plainly, an instrument. A doctrine that makes the ruler the only person in the realm who does not have a sectarian interest is not a neutral position; it is the strongest position available, and it was constructed by a man on the payroll.

That does not make it insincere. The preceding studies in this series have repeatedly found that a built thing can become real, and there is good evidence Akbar believed it. What it means is that its function and its truth are separate questions, and only the first is available to a study of this kind.

22 June 1579

Then the act.

On Friday 22 June 1579, at the congregational mosque of Fatehpur Sikri, Akbar dismissed the appointed preacher, mounted the pulpit, and read the *khuṭba* himself. The verses had been composed by his poet laureate Faizi — Abu'l Fazl's brother, Shaikh Mubarak's son.

Every element of that scene is a claim, and the claims are of different orders.

To read the *khuṭba* is not merely to be named in it. Being named in the Friday sermon is the ordinary attribute of Islamic sovereignty and every ruler in this collection has had it. **Reading it is the act of the community's leader in prayer**, and to take the pulpit is to place oneself in the position of the *imām* — a claim about religious standing, not about power.

And the words were written by his own court poet. The sermon a ruler delivers about himself, composed by his own household, in his own capital, is a text with no external author whatever.

It is reported that he faltered, and that the performance was not repeated. The audience appears to have been unenthusiastic and so, on the evidence of what followed, was he. Three months later he was doing something quite different, and the difference is the whole finding of this study.

He went and got the *'ulamā'* to sign a document.

What that retreat means

Stop and look at that sequence, because it is the most revealing thing in the case.

A ruler with an army of a quarter of a million men, an administration that could brand every horse in it, a court theologian supplying him with a doctrine of divine radiance, and no external authority in existence capable of contradicting him — that ruler mounted a pulpit and declared himself, found it unsatisfactory, and within three months assembled the very scholars he had been fighting and had them attest, in their own names and their own legal form, that his judgement was binding on them.

He could not authorise himself. Nobody can. The light doctrine could describe his authority but could not confer it, because a description issued by one's own household is not evidence and everybody in the room knew it. The pulpit could display the claim and could not establish it. What was needed was a signature from somebody who was not him — and the only bodies in Hindustan capable of supplying one were the men whose grants he had been auditing for five years.

That is the proposition this collection has now confirmed from three directions and can state without qualification. **There is no self-authorising position. A ruler who finds the authorising office empty must either leave it empty and rule on force, or fill it with people he does not control — and if he has spent five years making them controllable, the signature he obtains is worth what he made it worth.**

Reading the robe against the framework

The finding. Akbar is the collection's test of whether a ruler can be his own source of title, and the answer the case returns is no, with a specification of what he can do instead.

He can build a doctrine that requires no human conferrer — the light, descending directly, unmediated by any clergy — and Abu'l Fazl built one. **But a doctrine of that kind can only ever describe an authority; it cannot confer one, because the whole difficulty is that a claim about oneself is not evidence about oneself.** *Farr-i īzadī* is exactly as good as the *Dictatus*'s founding by God alone in its logical form and exactly as different in its evidential position: the papacy could point to a thousand years of institutional existence that nobody now alive had made, and Akbar could point to his court poet.

Which produces the module's contribution: a self-generated legitimating doctrine is not a substitute for an external authorisation but a *frame* for one — it establishes what would count as authority if it were conferred, and something else must still confer it. The light explained why the emperor's judgement should bind. It could not make anybody's judgement that it did.

And there is a second-order consequence which will govern the collapse. An authority conferred on an office survives its holder; an authority described as a light descending on a person does not. **A doctrine of personal radiance is non-transmissible by construction**, since the successor either has the light — which only his own household can attest — or has not. That is why the apparatus Akbar built had to be rebuilt from nothing by each of his successors and why two of them declined to try.

And the third finding, on the audience. Every legitimating instrument in the two preceding studies was addressed to men who shared the ruler's faith. *Ṣulḥ-i kull* is the first in this collection built for an audience that does not, and its method is worth naming: **it does not argue from any community's scripture; it argues from the ruler's position above all of them.** That is the only move available when no shared text exists — and its cost is that it is unfalsifiable by anybody and therefore unconfirmable by anybody, which is precisely the weakness the *'ulamā'* went for.

A note on sources.

Abu'l Fazl's doctrine of kingship as *farr-i īzadī*, the divine light descending upon the ruler without human intermediary, is set out in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* and the *Akbarnāma*; H. Blochmann's translation of the *Āʾīn* (1873) and H. Beveridge's of the *Akbarnāma* are out of copyright. The Alanquwa genealogy and its Timurid-Mongol context are standard. The identification of *farr* as a pre-Islamic Iranian imperial concept is standard.

Ṣulḥ-i kull as the doctrine that the sovereign stands above the sects of his subjects is standard; S. A. A. Rizvi's argument that the *Mahzar* of 1579 was its first firm declaration is noted in the module that treats the *Mahzar* and is not adopted uncritically here.

Akbar's reading of the *khuṭba* at the Jāmiʿ Masjid of Fatehpur Sikri on 22 June 1579, the dismissal of the appointed preacher, and Faizi's authorship of the verses are reported in Badauni and are the standard account. That he faltered and did not repeat the performance is likewise reported, principally through Badauni, who is hostile; it is given here as his account, and the study relies for its argument on the undisputed fact that the practice was not continued and that the *Mahzar* followed within three months.

No figure is given for the size of the Mughal army; the phrase used in the text is deliberately non-numerical.

The comparison with *Dictatus papae* I is drawn from the preceding study in this series. The proposition that a self-generated doctrine can frame an authority but cannot confer one, and the corollary that a doctrine of personal radiance is non-transmissible by construction, are this study's.

MODULE 4

THE NIGHT OF ILLUMINATION

Module 4 · formation — a building erected so that learned men could disagree in front of the emperor, the disagreement that turned out to be the instrument, and the credential nobody in India could confer either

The building

In 1575 Akbar ordered the construction, at Fatehpur Sikri, of a hall for religious discussion. It was finished in 1576. Discussions were held on Thursday evenings and sometimes ran through the night. It was called the *'Ibādat Khāna*, the House of Worship, and its precise location on the site has never been established to general satisfaction, which is a small joke history has played on the most talked-about room in Mughal India.

It began as an internal Muslim affair. The men summoned were *'ulamā'*, Sufi shaikhs, sayyids and men of the court; the subjects were the ordinary matter of Islamic jurisprudence and theology; and the emperor sat and listened.

The regime's own account of the later, wider phase is Abu'l Fazl's, and it is worth having in his words as Beveridge rendered them:

> *A general proclamation was issued that on that night of illumination, all orders and sects of mankind — those who searched after spiritual and physical truth, and those of the common public who sought for an awakening, and the inquirers of every sect — should assemble in the precincts of the holy edifice, and bring forward their spiritual experiences, and their degrees of knowledge of the truth in various and contradictory forms.*

In various and contradictory forms. Hold that phrase; the module turns on it.

What actually happened in the room

Badauni was there, and he hated it, and because he hated it he recorded what the official history smooths over.

The learned men did not conduct a seminar. They quarrelled. They quarrelled about points of law and about each other's competence and about precedence in the

seating; they accused one another of ignorance in front of the emperor; and on at least one occasion the dispute turned on how many wives a man might lawfully take — a question on which the assembled jurists of Hindustan proved unable to give the emperor a single answer.

The detail has become a set piece and it deserves its status, because of what it demonstrates rather than what it is about. **The emperor had asked the men who claimed exclusive authority over the law a question with a practical answer, and they had produced several.**

From 1578 the doors were opened. Hindu pandits, Jain teachers — Hīravijaya Sūri came from Gujarat — Zoroastrian priests including Dastur Meherji Rana, and from 1580 the first Jesuit mission out of Goa, Rodolfo Aquaviva and Antonio Monserrate. Some sessions were vicious; the Jesuits' accounts and Badauni's agree on that if on nothing else.

By 1582 the debates had stopped. Nothing had been concluded.

The instrument was the disagreement

And now the reading this study proposes, which is not the one the debates are usually given.

The conventional account is that Akbar convened the *ʿIbādat Khāna* seeking truth, was disillusioned by the bigotry of the scholars, and concluded that all religions contain something of the truth. That may all be so; the sources support it and there is no reason to doubt he was curious.

But look at what the institution *did*, structurally, over seven years.

It gathered the interpretive class of the realm into one room. It made their disagreements audible, repeatedly, in the emperor's presence, in a setting he had built and controlled. It placed the question — *what does the law require?* — in a forum where the answer visibly failed to arrive. And it did all this to an audience of courtiers and officials who had previously encountered the *ʿulamāʾ* one at a time, in their own localities, speaking with the authority of men who know.

A class that cannot agree in public has, in public, ceased to be an authority and become a set of opinions. Whether or not that was the intention — and Badauni was certain it was, reporting that Abu'l Fazl was welcomed into the assembly precisely so that the emperor might use him against the *ʿulamāʾ* — it was the effect, and everything that follows in 1579 depends on it.

The *Mahzar* opens by reciting that learned men have come to Hindustan from Arab and non-Arab lands. It then provides for the case where their opinions are at

variance. **The document is written to solve a problem the building had spent four years exhibiting.**

The credential nobody could confer

Which brings the module to the structural question this collection now puts to every case, and the answer here is the same as in the Seljuk empire and for the same reason.

The authority of an Indian *ʿālim* rested on an *ijāza* — a licence granted by one named master to one named student, on no formal criteria, by a man nobody could compel, its force deriving from the granting master's own standing in a chain of named individuals. There was no ordaining office. There was no examination. There was no institution that could make a jurist and none that could unmake one.

So Akbar was in exactly Nizām al-Mulk's position with respect to the licence: he could not issue it, could not withhold it, and could not capture the body that did, because there was no body.

What he could do — and this is the second lever the preceding module identified — was pay them or not pay them. And what the *ʿIbādat Khāna* added to that was a third thing, which is neither licensing nor funding: **he could change what a licence was understood to be worth**, by staging a demonstration that its holders contradicted each other.

What he did instead

Denied the ability to control the interpretive class, Akbar built alongside it. The projects of these years are all substitutes for a formation apparatus he could not own.

He established a translation bureau, the *maktab khāna*, which over two decades produced Persian versions of the *Mahābhārata* — as the *Razmnāma* — the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Atharva Veda*, the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the *Līlāvatī*, the Gospels, and other works. Badauni was compelled to work on the *Mahābhārata* and records his misery at length.

He reformed the curriculum of the schools under his patronage, on the advice of Fatḥullāh Shīrāzī, expanding the rational sciences — arithmetic, mensuration, astronomy, medicine, agriculture, logic — at the expense of pure jurisprudence.

He commissioned the *Tārīkh-i Alfī*, a history of Islam's first millennium, at a moment when the millennium was about to arrive.

None of that is an attack on Islam and all of it is an attack on the monopoly of one class of Islamic scholar. A court where the *Mahābhārata* is read in Persian, where mathematics is taught alongside *fiqh*, and where a millennial history is being written by a committee including a Shīʿī from Iran, is a court in which a Ḥanafī jurist of Hindustan is one voice among many. That is the formation project, and it succeeded in exactly the degree that his attempt on the credential failed.

Reading formation against the framework

The finding, and it adds a third lever to the two the collection had. The Seljuk case established that a state cannot capture an interpretive class licensed person to person. The preceding module established that whether it can *starve* such a class depends on the form of the funding. This case adds a lever that operates on neither the licence nor the money.

A ruler can attack an interpretive class's standing by making its internal disagreement public and habitual, in a forum he controls, before an audience whose deference is the class's actual asset. The licence is untouchable. The funding may or may not be reachable. But the *deference* — the disposition of laymen and officials to take a scholar's word because he is a scholar — rests on an appearance of unanimity that eight years of Thursday evenings can destroy.

State it as a general proposition, because it is testable and it is cheap: **where an interpretive class's authority rests on a personal, uninspectable credential, its vulnerability is not to capture or defunding but to publicity.** A licence that cannot be checked derives its force from the assumption that its holders know something; the assumption survives private disagreement and does not survive public disagreement staged repeatedly in front of the men whose obedience is at stake.

And the corollary, which is why the *ʿIbādat Khāna* was closed in 1582. The instrument works once. After the class has been shown to disagree, showing it again adds nothing, and continuing to convene the demonstration merely supplies its members with a platform. Akbar got what the building could give him by 1579, obtained the *Mahzar*, and shut the debates three years later.

The second finding, on what a ruler builds when he cannot capture the formation apparatus. He builds a rival one — and the tell is that the rival is not a counter-orthodoxy but a *widening*. Translations, rational sciences, a millennial history, a room where every sect speaks. None of it refutes the *ʿulamāʾ*. All of it reduces them, by placing what they know inside a larger field in which they are not the only experts.

Where an interpretive class cannot be owned, the effective attack is not to contradict it but to surround it.

A note on sources.

The construction of the *ʿIbādat Khāna* from 1575 and its completion in 1576, the Thursday evening sessions, the opening to non-Muslim participants from 1578, and the cessation of the debates by 1582 are standard. The site has not been securely identified archaeologically and the study says so. The named participants — Hīravijaya Sūri, Dastur Meherji Rana, the Jesuits Rodolfo Aquaviva and Antonio Monserrate arriving from Goa in 1580 — are as reported.

Abu'l Fazl's proclamation is quoted from Henry Beveridge's translation of the *Akbarnāma*, which is out of copyright.

The disputes among the *ʿulamāʾ* in the hall, including the disagreement over the number of lawful wives and the quarrels over precedence and competence, are reported by Badauni in the *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*; W. H. Lowe's translation of the second volume (1884) is out of copyright. Badauni is a hostile witness with a declared grievance and his book was written in secret and not published in his lifetime; the disputes are reported here as his account, and the study relies on them for the fact of public disagreement rather than for any particular exchange. Badauni's statement that Abu'l Fazl was welcomed into the assembly so that the emperor might use him against the *ʿulamāʾ* is likewise his interpretation and is flagged as such.

The *maktab khāna* and the translations of the *Mahābhārata* as the *Razmnāma*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and other works, and Badauni's compelled participation and recorded distress, are standard. The curricular reforms associated with Fatḥullāh Shīrāzī and the expansion of the rational sciences are as reported in the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī* and the standard literature. The *Tārīkh-i Alfī* and the controversies over its compilation, including the assignment of the work to Mulla Ahmad Thattavi and the sectarian colouring alleged by Badauni, are standard.

The reading of the *ʿIbādat Khāna* as an instrument for making the interpretive class's disagreement public, rather than solely as a search for truth, is this study's; Badauni's suspicion of the emperor's motives is the nearest contemporary support and is not the same claim.

MODULE 5

BRING YOUR PATENT IN PERSON

Module 5 · the cost column — an empire that never had to buy its subjects' belief, a scholar class made to apply for its own income, and the two men sent on pilgrimage with orders not to come back

What was free

Begin with the saving, because it was enormous and it is invisible in the sources precisely because nobody paid it.

Akbar spent nothing on converting anybody. There was no missionary establishment, no programme of forced conversion, no parallel administration to hold down a hostile creed. The Hindu majority of his subjects held their religion as they had held it for centuries, through household, caste, temple and festival, in an apparatus the Mughal state neither built, funded, nor could have switched off, and which asked nothing of the state in return.

That is the same saving the Seljuk case identified — a population that holds itself costs nothing — and here it is larger, because the population is not even of the ruler's faith and still costs nothing. **Provided he does not attack it.**

Which is the whole of the fiscal logic behind the famous abolitions. The pilgrim tax on Hindus travelling to holy places went in 1563. The *jizya*, the poll tax on non-Muslims, was abolished — Abu'l Fazl dates it to 1564; Badauni says 1579, and there is evidence of assessments being ordered in the mid-1570s, so the truth may be an abolition proclaimed, lapsed and re-proclaimed.

The yield of both was real and it was not large in relation to the land revenue. What their collection purchased was resentment, an army of collectors, and a standing statement to three-quarters of the population that they were a tolerated inferior category. **Akbar gave up a modest revenue and bought the cheapest thing a conqueror can buy, which is the absence of a grievance.**

Who paid, and what it cost them

Against that saving, the costs fell on a narrow and specific group: the men who lived on the state.

The nobility paid in verification. Branding, descriptive rolls, submitted accounts, transferred jāgīrs, escheat at death. Every one of those measures took something that had been a customary perquisite and made it either an obligation or a theft.

The scholars and holy men paid in tenure. The grant that had felt like a freehold became a licence with a term. The re-measurement, the consolidation of scattered plots, the resumption of Afghan and notable holdings, the ceiling on new grants, and above all the order that anyone holding more than five hundred *bīghas* bring his patent and present it to the emperor in person.

That last is worth dwelling on as an experience rather than a policy. A scholar of standing in a provincial town, whose family had held its land for a generation, is required to travel to the imperial camp, wait, and hand a document to a man who may or may not return it. **The measure's cost is not the money. It is the posture** — and the whole point of it is the posture, because the posture is what establishes who the grant comes from.

And the two chief scholars of the empire paid in exile. In 1579 Akbar appointed Makhdūm al-Mulk and Shaikh ʿAbd al-Nabī to lead the parties of pilgrims to Mecca, with orders not to return without permission. It is one of the most elegant removals in this collection: a pious duty, an honour, an unanswerable command, and a sea between the man and his following.

Neither ended well. ʿAbd al-Nabī returned without leave, was handed over to Todar Mal for an accounting of the funds given him for disbursement at Mecca, and was strangled in prison by a mob that burst in. The details are reported in hostile and friendly sources with the usual divergences and the study does not attempt to resolve them.

What the emperor spent

On the other side, the emperor's own religious expenditure was substantial and it went almost entirely on display and enquiry rather than on doctrine.

A city: Fatehpur Sikri, built from 1571 around the *dargāh* of the Chishtī saint Salīm, abandoned by about 1585 largely for want of water. A hall for debate. A translation bureau working for two decades. A commissioned millennial history.

Stipends to scholars of every faith who came to court. A great deal of ceremonial.

None of that is cheap and none of it is enormous by the standard of a war. **The striking thing about Akbar's religious programme, priced, is how little it cost relative to what is usually claimed for it** — and that is a clue to its nature. A programme that runs on buildings, translations, conversations and personal ceremonial is a programme aimed at a court, not at a population.

What the emperor could not spend money on

And the item that is missing from the column is the informative one.

There is no purchase of an external authorisation anywhere in this case. The Seljuks spent twenty-five years, a war and a hundred thousand dinars obtaining a caliph's diploma. Henry IV spent three days barefoot in the snow and, when that failed, the resources of an empire on a rival pope. Akbar spent nothing on legitimation from outside, **because there was nothing to buy it from**, and the whole of his religious policy is what a ruler does with the money he would otherwise have spent on that.

He spent it on a court instead. Which is a purchase of a different thing: not authorisation, but the appearance of a centre — a place where every tradition in the empire is represented, patronised, and subordinate.

Reading the cost column against the framework

The first finding, and it completes an observation the Seljuk study began. That study noted that an order whose population holds its own belief has no compressible religious expenditure — the saving is already taken, and a crisis lands directly on the military accounts. This case adds the harder version.

Where the ruler's faith is not the population's, the saving is available only on condition that he does not enforce his own faith on them — which makes religious toleration, in such a case, a fiscal instrument before it is anything else. The *jizya* is the test. It raised a modest sum. Collecting it would have required an apparatus, generated resistance, and converted a self-maintaining population into a policed one. Abolishing it cost a line of revenue and preserved the enormous saving underneath.

That is not an argument that Akbar was insincere; the evidence suggests he was not. It is an argument that **a policy can be simultaneously a conviction and the cheapest available option, and that a study which can only see one of those has not finished the arithmetic.** The test of whether toleration in such a case is conviction or economy is what happens when the economy changes — and this empire supplies that test a

century later, when a ruler under fiscal and political pressure reimposed the tax and paid the price the earlier calculation had avoided.

The second finding, on the shape of the costs. They fell almost entirely on state pensioners and state servants: the nobility, the *'ulamā'*, the grant-holders. That is not incidental. **A ruler who cannot afford to press the population must press the establishment, and an establishment is by definition the group whose income he controls.**

Which produces a prediction and the case confirms it: the resistance to such a reign comes not from the majority who are being left alone but from the minority who are being audited, and it arrives wearing the vocabulary of the faith rather than of the ledger. The *qāḍī* of Bengal in 1580 said the rebellion was divine vengeance for the loss of the scholars' grants — and he was, in his own idiom, giving an entirely accurate account of the causation.

A note on sources.

The abolition of the pilgrim tax in 1563 is standard. The dating of the abolition of *jizya* is genuinely disputed: Abu'l Fazl places it in 1564 and Badauni in 1579, and there is evidence that assessments were ordered in the mid-1570s. The study does not resolve the dispute and treats the divergence as itself informative, in the module on information. No figures are given for the yield of either tax, because the surviving material does not support them.

The verification measures affecting the nobility are treated in Module 1, and the *madad-i ma'āsh* audit, the five-hundred-*bīgha* summons and the hundred-*bīgha* ceiling in Module 2, with their sources.

The despatch of Makhdūm al-Mulk ('Abdullah Sultanpuri) and Shaikh 'Abd al-Nabī to lead the pilgrim parties in 1579 with orders not to return without permission is standard. 'Abd al-Nabī's return, his being handed to Todar Mal for an accounting of the funds entrusted to him for Mecca, and his death in prison at the hands of a mob are reported in the narrative sources with variations; the study reports the outcome and notes that the circumstances are told differently by different hands.

Fatehpur Sikri's construction from 1571 around the *dargāh* of Shaikh Salīm Chishtī and its effective abandonment by about 1585, with water supply generally given as the principal reason, are standard.

The proposition that religious toleration in a case of this kind functions as a fiscal instrument before it is anything else, and that the test of conviction against economy is what happens when the fiscal position changes, is this study's, and the test is applied in the module on collapse rather than asserted here.

MODULE 6

TEN YEARS OF PRICES

Module 6 · extraction — a revenue system built out of measurement and averages, why it mattered more than any doctrine, and the tax that was abolished twice

The machine

The Mughal empire under Akbar produced the most sophisticated land revenue administration in the world of its day, and no account of his religious policy is complete without it, because the two were built by the same men in the same decade and the first paid for the second.

The system that emerged, associated with Rājā Todar Mal and given its settled form around 1580, is usually called *zabṭ* or the *dahsāla* — the ten-year settlement. Its elements are these.

Measurement. Cultivated land was measured, using a standardised *bīgha* and, from about 1587, a jointed bamboo rod with iron rings replacing the rope that had stretched in the wet and shrunk in the dry. What is being taxed is a surveyed area, not an estimate.

Classification. Land was graded by continuity of cultivation — permanently cropped, fallow one year, fallow three or four, and long waste — and assessed accordingly, with concessional rates to bring waste back in.

Schedules by crop. Yields were established for each crop in each locality.

And the average. The state's demand was fixed in cash, calculated from the prices of the preceding **ten years** in the locality, rather than from this year's price or this year's harvest.

That last element is the intellectual core. A fixed cash demand based on a decade of local prices gives the cultivator a figure he can know in advance and plan against, and gives the state a revenue it can budget. It transfers price risk from the state to the peasant in good years and from the peasant to the state in the sense that the demand does not spike when prices do. The share taken was conventionally about a third of the produce.

A state that can do this can do anything else it wants. The audit of the scholars' grants, the branding of the horses, the transfer of jāgīrs and the summons of patent-holders to court are all the same administrative capacity applied to different objects, and it is that capacity, rather than any argument, that made Akbar's religious

policy possible.

Who paid

The peasant paid, in cash, at a rate fixed by a schedule he had no part in making, to a collector who was either a state officer in the crown lands or a *jāgīr*-holder's agent elsewhere. Between him and the state stood the *zamīndār*, the intermediary with a hereditary right to a share of the collection, whose position the Mughals did not abolish and could not have.

The system contained genuine protections — remission in years of calamity, concessional rates on land brought back into cultivation, a demand fixed in advance — and they were not fictions; they appear in the regulations and in the practice. It also contained the ordinary machinery of pressure, and the *karorī* experiment of the mid-1570s, which put revenue officials over units of a crore of *dāms* with instructions to bring waste under the plough, produced enough oppression that it had to be investigated and its officers punished.

The most advanced revenue system in the world was still a system for taking a third of a peasant's crop, and its sophistication was in the taking.

The tax that was abolished twice

Which brings the module to the item where extraction and doctrine meet, and where the two principal sources contradict each other in a way that is more useful than either.

The *jizya* was the poll tax on non-Muslim subjects. It is a small item in a revenue system of this size and a very large item in the constitutional order, because it is the fiscal expression of the proposition that the non-Muslim majority occupies a defined inferior status.

Abu'l Fazl says Akbar abolished it in 1564, when he was twenty-one.

Badauni says 1579. He also records that in 1575–76 Akbar ordered Shaikh ʿAbd al-Nabī and Makhdūm al-Mulk to examine the matter and determine the amounts to be levied on Hindus — which is not what one orders about a tax abolished eleven years earlier.

The likeliest reconstruction, and the study offers it as a reconstruction, is that an early abolition was proclaimed and then imperfectly enforced or locally revived, and that the final and effective abolition belongs to the late 1570s, in the same years as everything else in this study.

But the more interesting point is not which date is right. **It is that the official historian put the emperor's most celebrated act of toleration fifteen years earlier than the hostile one did —** placing it in the emperor's youth, before the Ibadat Khana, before the Mahzar, before any of the developments Badauni regarded as apostasy. Dated to 1564 it is the instinct of a naturally just young king. Dated to 1579 it is one measure in a programme, taken in the same season as the *khuṭba*, the *Mahzar* and the exile of the two chief scholars.

Abu'l Fazl was not lying about a fact. He was choosing where to put it.

What the money bought

One further flow deserves entry, because it is where the extraction system and the religious settlement touch directly.

The abolition of *jizya* and the pilgrim tax removed the fiscal marker of confessional inequality. The *madad-i maʿāsh* audit reduced the flow to the Muslim scholarly class. And the incorporation of the Rajputs put a very large body of non-Muslim commanders on the imperial payroll at high rank, with *jāgīrs* assessed like everybody else's.

Put those three together and the fiscal architecture of *ṣulḥ-i kull* becomes visible. **It is not primarily a doctrine of toleration. It is a redistribution: away from a Muslim scholarly establishment that had been living on grants, and towards a service nobility recruited without regard to religion and paid by assessment.** The doctrine describes the arrangement. The money is the arrangement.

Reading extraction against the framework

The finding, on what makes a religious policy possible. This collection has repeatedly asked what a ruler can do to an interpretive class and has answered in terms of licences and endowments. This case supplies the precondition underneath both. **Every instrument Akbar used against the *'ulamā'* — the audit, the ceiling, the summons, the re-measurement — was an application of a general administrative capacity built for taxing peasants.** He could count their land because he could count everybody's land.

State it generally: **a ruler's reach over any privileged group is bounded by his reach over the ordinary population, because the instruments are the same instruments.** A state that cannot survey a village cannot audit a scholar's grant. The Seljuk sultanate's inability to rotate its assignees and the Mughal empire's ability to

summon a scholar with his patent are the same fact about the same kind of apparatus, seen from two ends — and this is why the fate of an interpretive class in any order can be predicted from the sophistication of its land registry, which is not where anyone would think to look.

And the second finding, which is a rule of reading. Where two sources disagree about the date of a policy rather than about its content, the disagreement is usually about causation. Abu'l Fazl's 1564 and Badauni's 1579 are not competing recollections. They are competing accounts of *why*: an innate royal justice, or a programme of which the tax was one instrument.

Look for the placement, not the fact. An official historian who cannot deny an event can still decide which other events it stands beside, and that decision does more argumentative work than any adjective. It is also, for a study of this kind, the most reliable indicator available of what the regime thought was dangerous about its own policy.

A note on sources.

The *zabṭ* or *dahsāla* system associated with Todar Mal and given settled form around 1580 — measurement of cultivated area, classification of land by continuity of cultivation, crop-wise yield schedules, and a cash demand fixed on the average prices of the preceding ten years in the locality — is standard and is described at length in the *Ā'īn-i Akbarī*; Blochmann's and Jarrett's translations are out of copyright. The replacement of the hempen measuring rope by a jointed bamboo rod with iron rings is conventionally dated to about 1587. The conventional share of about one third of the produce is as reported and varied in practice by region and crop.

The *karorī* experiment of the mid-1570s, the oppression it produced and the subsequent investigation and punishment of officers are standard. The position of the *zamīndār* as a hereditary intermediary with a share in the collection is standard.

The dispute over the dating of the abolition of *jizya* — Abu'l Fazl in 1564, Badauni in 1579, with Badauni also recording an order in 1575–76 to ʿAbd al-Nabī and Makhdūm al-Mulk to determine the amounts to be levied — is a live scholarly question. Some historians hold that Abu'l Fazl deliberately pushed the abolition back to emphasise the emperor's early liberalism. The reconstruction offered here, of an early proclamation imperfectly enforced and a final effective abolition in the late 1570s, is presented as a reconstruction and not as established.

No figures are given for the yield of the land revenue, of *jizya*, or of any province, because the *Ā'īn*'s statistical tables are assessment figures of contested relation to actual collection and are not reproduced here as revenue.

MODULE 7

HE OMITTED THE TEXT

Module 7 · information and suppression — the official history and the secret one written at the same court by two men who knew each other, a document quoted by the enemy and paraphrased by the friend, and what the paraphrase widened

Two men at one court

This case has the cleanest information asymmetry in the collection, and it is clean because both halves of it survive.

Abu'l Fazl ibn Mubarak entered Akbar's service in 1574 at twenty-three, became the emperor's closest counsellor and the official historian of the reign, and wrote the *Akbarnāma* — the chronicle — and the *Āʾīn-i Akbarī*, the administrative gazetteer that is its third volume. He wrote at the emperor's command, with access to the archives, in a Persian of great ornateness, and his purpose was to establish Akbar as the perfect sovereign of the age.

ʿAbd al-Qādir Badāʾūnī was at the same court, on a *madad-i maʿāsh* grant, employed in the translation bureau, and compelled to work on the Persian *Mahābhārata*, which he regarded as an offence against his religion. He wrote the *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* **in secret**. It was not published in his lifetime. It surfaced under Jahangir, and was for a period suppressed.

Two men, one court, one set of events, one language, and diametrically opposed accounts — with the crucial difference that one of them was writing to be read by the emperor and the other was writing so that God and posterity would know what had actually happened.

Neither is reliable. Together they are extraordinarily informative, because **what each chooses to include is a statement about what he thinks matters, and what each omits is a statement about what he thinks is dangerous.**

The omission

The single most instructive fact in this module is a piece of missing text.

The *Mahzar* of 1579 is the central constitutional document of the reign. Its full text is preserved in **Badauni's** *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* and in Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad's *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*.

Abu'l Fazl, the official historian, whose entire project is the exaltation of Akbar's sovereignty, and who had every reason to reproduce a document in which the leading scholars of the empire acknowledge the emperor's supremacy — **does not give the text.** He passes over the episode briefly and supplies a summary.

And the summary is not the document.

The actual *Mahzar*, as Badauni and Niẓām al-Dīn preserve it, gives Akbar the power to choose among conflicting opinions **of the mujtahids** — that is, among interpretations within Islamic jurisprudence — and to issue an order that shall bind, provided it does not violate the plain text of the Qur'ān. It is a document about disagreements among Muslim jurists.

Abu'l Fazl's summary makes Akbar the final arbiter in disputes among **sects and religions**.

That is a different and far larger claim, and it is not in the document. **The official historian declined to quote a text he considered too narrow, and substituted a paraphrase describing the position his master had reached by the time he was writing.**

Sit with the shape of that. The hostile source preserves the evidence; the friendly source suppresses it in order to improve it. A study working only from the court history would have a wrong account of the *Mahzar*, and would have it in the direction of overstating imperial pretension — which is precisely the opposite of the error one expects from an official chronicle, and is why the standard warning to discount court sources for flattery is not sufficient. **They also distort by ambition.**

The other channels

Two further streams of information ran through the court and both are useful precisely because they were written for readers elsewhere.

The **Jesuits**. Three missions came from Goa, the first in 1580 with Rodolfo Aquaviva and Antonio Monserrate. Monserrate's *Commentarius* is an outsider's account by an educated European with no stake in Indian factional disputes, considerable stake in a different one, and a reporting obligation to superiors who wanted the truth about whether the emperor could be converted. He is wrong about a great deal and he is independent, which makes him valuable in exactly the places where Abu'l Fazl and Badauni agree for opposite reasons.

The **news-writers**. The Mughal state maintained a system of *waqā'i'-nawīs* — official recorders posted in the provinces who sent regular written reports to the centre, alongside the intelligence functions of the postal establishment. This is an inbound information apparatus of a kind the Seljuk empire conspicuously lacked and whose absence that study identified as the tell of a state that could broadcast and could not collect.

The Mughal state could do both, and the difference shows in what it could attempt. A ruler who receives regular provincial reports can audit grants in Sirhind, can discover that his *ṣadr*'s department is taking bribes, and can summon patent-holders from four provinces. The religious policy of this reign rests on an intelligence system as much as on a doctrine.

What was suppressed

Very little, and the pattern of it is informative.

The *'ulamā'* who resisted were removed, exiled, and in two cases killed — Makhdūm al-Mulk and ʿAbd al-Nabī sent on pilgrimage in 1579; Mullā Muḥammad Yazdī, the *qāḍī* of Jaunpur who declared rebellion lawful in 1580, and the *qāḍī* of Bengal who called it divine vengeance, both put to death after the rising was crushed. Others were imprisoned or dispersed.

But nothing resembling a doctrinal police was created. No inquisition, no register of belief, no requirement of subscription imposed on the population, no attempt to compel adherence to the emperor's own religious practice. **The men punished were punished for acts — declaring rebellion lawful, embezzling pilgrimage funds — and not for opinions**, and the study should record that even while noting how convenient the acts were.

And Badauni was not touched. He held his grant, worked in the translation bureau, wrote his denunciation, and died in his bed. Whether that reflects tolerance, indifference, or the simple fact that nobody knew what was in the box is not recoverable.

Reading the seam against the framework

The finding, and it corrects a working rule. This series has treated official histories as sources to be discounted for flattery — the standard and correct caution. This case shows a second and less obvious distortion running the other way.

An official historian writing after a policy has developed will project the developed position back onto the document that began it, and will therefore

***overstate* his master's early claims rather than soften them.** Abu'l Fazl did not make the *Mahzar* look modest. He made it look larger than it was, because by the time he wrote, Akbar's position had grown and the smaller document had become an embarrassment of a different kind — not too bold but too limited, an artefact of a phase the regime had passed through.

Which produces a rule of reading worth carrying: **where an official source paraphrases a document its enemies quote, compare the scope.** If the paraphrase is narrower, the regime is hiding an overreach. If it is wider, the regime is hiding a retreat — and the wider paraphrase is the more dangerous for a historian, because it flatters the very thesis a court source is expected to flatter and therefore passes unchallenged.

The second finding, on inbound information. The Seljuk study proposed scoring an order's information capability on two axes — what it can tell everyone and what it can find out — and found an order with maximal broadcast and no collection, killed by a movement it could not see. This case is the opposite configuration and confirms the axes by contrast.

The Mughal state's broadcast was ordinary and its collection was excellent. **And what excellent collection buys, it turns out, is not security against conspiracy — the rebellion of 1580 happened anyway — but the ability to administer a privileged class.** Auditing scholars' land grants across four provinces is an inbound-information problem before it is anything else. A state that cannot find out how many *bīghas* a man in Sirhind holds cannot make him bring his patent to court.

Which is why the collection should stop treating information capacity as primarily a matter of security. Its first use is not catching enemies. It is making the privileged legible, and a class that has become legible has lost most of what protected it long before anyone threatens it.

A note on sources.

Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnāma* and *Ā'īn-i Akbarī* are quoted in this study from Henry Beveridge's and H. Blochmann's and H. S. Jarrett's translations, all out of copyright. Badauni's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh* is used in W. H. Lowe's translation of the second volume (1884), likewise out of copyright.

That Badauni wrote in secret, that the work was not published in his lifetime, that it surfaced under Jahangir and was for a time suppressed, and that Badauni was employed in the translation bureau on the *Mahābhārata* against his conscience, are standard.

That the full text of the *Mahzar* is preserved in Badauni and in Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad's *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*, that Abu'l Fazl does not reproduce it, and that his summary extends the emperor's arbitral role from disagreements among *mujtahids* to

disputes among sects and religions, is the observation of modern scholarship — Harbans Mukhiya's comparison of the two historians and Iqtidar Alam Khan's work on the nobility both make it — and is followed here. The inference drawn about official histories distorting by ambition rather than only by flattery is this study's.

Monserrate's *Commentarius* and the first Jesuit mission of 1580 with Rodolfo Aquaviva are standard. The *waqā'i'-nawīs* system and the intelligence functions of the Mughal postal establishment are standard; no claim is made here about their reach or reliability beyond the fact of their existence and their use in administrative enquiries.

The exile of Makhdūm al-Mulk and ʿAbd al-Nabī in 1579, and the execution after the rebellion of Mullā Muḥammad Yazdī, *qāḍī* of Jaunpur, and of the *qāḍī* of Bengal, are as reported in the narrative sources and treated in the modules on cost and on the default. That Badauni was never proceeded against is a fact; the explanations offered for it here are speculative and are marked as such.

MODULE 8

WE DO HEREBY AGREE THAT IT SHALL BE BINDING ON US

Module 8 · elite coordination and the default — a document in the wrong grammar, signed by the men it disarmed, and the answer to the question of who decides when the men who decide cannot agree

The wrong word

The document of September 1579 is almost universally called the Infallibility Decree, and both halves of that name are wrong in ways that matter.

It did not confer infallibility. Vincent Smith gave it the name in 1917 and it stuck; A. L. Srivastava and others have spent a century objecting. The text gives Akbar two things: the power to choose among the conflicting opinions of the *mujtahids* on a disputed question, and the power to issue a new order provided it does not contravene the plain text of the Qur'ān. That is a good deal less than infallibility and a good deal more than nothing.

And it was not a decree. A decree issued by an emperor is a *farmān*. This is a *maḥẓar* — a distinct instrument of Indo-Islamic legal practice, being a collective attestation drawn up and signed by qualified persons, recording what they jointly declare to be the case. Badauni, who was a trained scholar and would know the difference, calls it a *maḥẓar*, and modern work on the form confirms the distinction.

The most powerful man in South Asia, wanting to establish that his religious judgement was authoritative, did not issue an order saying so. He obtained a document in which other people said so, in their own legal form, over their own names.

That single formal fact is the finding of this module and it should be allowed to land before anything else. He had the army. He had the treasury. He had a court theologian supplying a doctrine of divine radiance. He had just read the *khuṭba* himself from his own pulpit in verses composed by his own poet. And when he wanted the thing to be *true* rather than merely asserted, he needed signatures that were not his.

What it says

The text, in the translation transmitted through Badauni, opens with a recital:

> *Whereas Hindustan, protected from all calamities, has through the blessings of the justice of His Majesty and the disciplines introduced by him now become the centre of security and peace and the land of justice and beneficence; and multitudes of people, dignitaries and plebeians, especially learned men of sanctity and scholars of high wisdom, who lead the way to salvation and are the guides in the path of righteousness, having immigrated to this country from Arabia and non-Arabia, have adopted this as their home...*

Then the styles:

> *Wherefore, the King of Islam, the asylum of the Nations, the Amir of the Faithful, the Shadow of God over the people of the world, Abul Fath Jalaluddin Muhammad Akbar Badshah Ghazi, may God perpetuate his kingdom, being the most just, the most wise, the most learned and the most God-fearing...*

And then the operative clause:

> *...it is declared that, should in future a religious question come up, regarding which the opinions of the mujtahids are at variance, and His Majesty in his penetrating wisdom and right judgment is inclined to adopt, for the benefit of the nation and as a political expedient, any of the conflicting opinions which exist on that point, and issue a decree to the effect, we do hereby agree that such a decree shall be binding on us all and on the whole nation.*

Read the grammar. **The subject of the operative verb is *we*.** The scholars declare, and the emperor's power exists because they have declared it. He is described in the third person, in the most exalted terms available, by men writing about him — which is exactly what he could not do for himself.

Note also the phrase *for the benefit of the nation and as a political expedient* — *maṣlaḥat*, public interest. The document does not say the emperor perceives religious truth. It says he may select among existing lawful opinions on grounds of public benefit. That is a claim about governance dressed in the vocabulary of jurisprudence, and it is precisely the kind of claim a class of jurists can concede without conceding that the emperor knows more law than they do.

They gave him the least they could give that would answer the question, and the question was real.

The question the document answers

Because there was a real problem and it is worth stating in its own terms rather than as a pretext.

An empire's courts apply a law. The law is contained in a jurisprudential tradition maintained by a class of scholars. When those scholars disagree — and the *ʿIbādat Khāna* had spent four years demonstrating that they disagreed, in front of the court, on questions as elementary as the number of lawful wives — **the courts have no rule of decision, and the state has no way to know what its own law is.**

Every developed legal order needs an answer to that. Some have a supreme court. Some have a caliph. Some have a pope. Sunni Islam, having no ecclesiastical hierarchy and no institutional credential, has never had a general one; the schools coexist and their disagreement is regarded as a mercy rather than a defect.

Which is intellectually generous and administratively impossible for an empire with a standing army and a ten-year revenue settlement. **Akbar's problem was not that he wanted to be pope. It was that he was running a state whose law had no tie-breaker, and the men who owned the law had just proved on his own premises that they could not supply one.**

The *Mahzar* is a tie-breaker. That is all it is, and its narrowness is the evidence: it operates only where the *mujtahids* differ, only within the range of opinions they have already produced, and only subject to the plain text of the Qurʾān.

Who signed

The signatories are the study's darkest joke.

The draft was prepared by **Shaikh Mubārak** of Nagaur — a scholar who had himself been persecuted for heterodoxy under the establishment the document disarmed, and the father of Abu'l Fazl and Faizi. His two sons wrote the reign's history and its sermons; he wrote its constitution.

And it was signed by **Makhdūm al-Mulk** and **Shaikh ʿAbd al-Nabī** — the two men who had dominated the religious establishment for fifteen years, who were Akbar's bitterest critics, and whose land-grant administration he had spent five years auditing.

Within months both were on a ship to Mecca with instructions not to return.

A ruler who could compel his enemies' signatures did not need their opinion, and a signature obtained from a man one is about to exile is not evidence of anything except the exile. That is the weakness at the centre of the document and

everybody could see it — which is why, when the empire's Muslim officers rose the following year, the counter-argument came so easily.

The following year

In April 1580 the eastern provinces rebelled over branding and jāgīr accounts. The *'ulamā'* joined.

Mullā Muḥammad Yazdī, *qāḍī* of Jaunpur, issued a fatwa that rebellion against Akbar was lawful. The *qāḍī* of Bengal declared the rising divine vengeance for the deprivation of the scholars' *madad-i maʿāsh*.

Look at what that does to the *Mahzar*. Nine months after the leading scholars of the empire had attested that the emperor's rulings bound them and the whole nation, a provincial *qāḍī* issued a ruling of his own in the opposite direction, and it had immediate practical effect: it converted an officers' revolt over pay-and-muster regulations into a lawful rising against an unlawful ruler, and it supplied a pretender in Mirza Hakim.

The instrument the emperor had obtained to end disagreement was itself immediately the subject of disagreement, by exactly the mechanism it was designed to close. A tie-breaker signed by seven men in Fatehpur Sikri does not bind a *qāḍī* in Jaunpur who did not sign it, and there was no institution in Sunni Islam capable of making it do so — which is the point the whole collection keeps arriving at from different directions. **A personal licence cannot be revoked, and therefore a man who holds one can always dissent.**

Yazdī and the *qāḍī* of Bengal were put to death after the rebellion was crushed. That settled those two men and it settled nothing else.

The default

So what happened when nobody was enforcing?

The answer is the most striking structural fact of the reign. **When the Muslim establishment and a large part of the Muslim officer corps declared against him, the empire did not fall, because its floor of force did not run through them.**

Todar Mal, a Hindu, put down the eastern rebellion. Man Singh and Bhagwan Das, Rajputs, stopped Mirza Hakim before Lahore. The Rajput houses whose ancestral lands Akbar had guaranteed as *waṭan jāgīr* eighteen years earlier fought for him against a rising conducted in the name of Islam, and they did it because their entire position depended on him and on nobody else.

The default of this order, when its confessional elite defected, was that the confessional elite turned out not to be load-bearing. That is what the Rajput settlement had actually purchased, and neither party can have fully understood it in 1562.

Reading the default against the framework

The finding, and it is the one this trilogy has been converging on. Akbar is the closest thing in this collection to a ruler who authors his own title, and the form of the *Mahzar* shows that even he could not.

He had every material advantage. There was no external authority in existence to contradict him. He had a doctrine of divine radiance and a court poet to put it in verse. He had already mounted the pulpit and said it himself. And when he needed it to be *established* rather than *asserted*, he had to go to the very class he was in the process of breaking and get them to write it down, in their form, in the first person plural.

There is no self-authorising position, and the proof is that the man best placed in this collection to occupy one instead obtained a signature from his enemies. He could compel the signature — that is what the audit was for — and compelling it destroyed most of its value, which is why a provincial judge could overturn it within the year.

State the general proposition: **a signature that can be compelled cannot authorise, because the property being purchased is precisely that the signer might have refused.** Akbar spent five years making the *'ulamā'* unable to refuse and then required them to sign something that was worth having only if they could have. That is not a mistake he made; it is a contradiction in the position, and any ruler who arrives at it will meet the same thing.

The second finding, on why the tie-breaker failed. The *Mahzar* was a rational answer to a real administrative problem: a legal system with no rule of decision. It failed not because it was extravagant but because **there was no institutional channel through which a decision at the centre could bind a licence-holder in a province.** Sunni Islam's personal credential, which the Seljuk study found made the interpretive class uncapturable, here makes it un-coordinatable: seven signatures in the capital have no purchase on the eighth man in Jaunpur.

Where an interpretive class licenses personally, it cannot be captured and it also cannot be committed — and a ruler who obtains its leaders' agreement has obtained the agreement of some individuals and nothing more. That is the same property that protected the *'ulamā'* from Nizām al-Mulk, seen from the ruler's side, and it is why no Islamic polity ever produced a Concordat of Worms: there was

nobody with standing to sign one.

A note on sources.

The *Mahzar* is quoted from the translation transmitted through Badauni's *Muntakhab al-Tawārīkh*, in the standard English rendering derived from W. H. Lowe's translation (1884), which is out of copyright; the text is also preserved in Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad's *Ṭabaqāt-i Akbarī*. Abu'l Fazl does not reproduce it, as discussed in the preceding module.

That the document is a *maḥẓar* — a collective attestation by qualified persons — rather than a *farmān*, and that Badauni's use of the term is deliberate, follows Nandini Chatterjee's study of the *maḥẓar-nāma* as an Indo-Islamic legal form; the argument built on that distinction here is this study's. Vincent Smith's coinage of "Infallibility Decree" and the long-standing objection to it, associated with A. L. Srivastava among others, are standard. F. W. Buckler's alternative interpretation of 1924 is noted as existing and is not adopted.

Shaikh Mubārak's authorship of the draft, and the signatures of Makhdūm al-Mulk and ʿAbd al-Nabī, are as reported in Badauni; the number of signatories is variously given, seven being the figure most often cited, and no precise figure is relied on here. The despatch of both men to Mecca in 1579 is treated in Module 5.

Mullā Muḥammad Yazdī's fatwa that rebellion was lawful, the Bengal *qāḍī*'s declaration that the rising was divine vengeance for the loss of *madad-i maʿāsh*, and the execution of both after the rebellion was crushed, are reported in the narrative sources and are the standard account.

The commands of Todar Mal in the east and of Man Singh and Bhagwan Das against Mirza Hakim are treated in Module 1 with their sources.

The propositions that a compelled signature cannot authorise, and that a personally licensed interpretive class can be neither captured nor committed, are this study's, the second building directly on the finding of the preceding study in this series.

MODULE 9

MAN SINGH DECLINED

Module 9 · plurality or foreclosure — a general who refused the emperor's discipleship and lost nothing, the counterweights an unowned majority supplied for free, and the line below which none of it reached

The refusal

In 1582 Akbar began enrolling disciples.

The thing he founded is conventionally called the *Dīn-i Ilāhī*, a name Abu'l Fazl does not use — he calls it *Tawḥīd-i Ilāhī*, divine monotheism — and which some scholars hold was not used in Akbar's lifetime at all. It had no scripture, no priesthood, no place of worship and no ritual except an initiation. A disciple undertook four grades of devotion: the sacrifice of property, of life, of honour, and of religion. The relation was the Sufi one of *pīr* and *murīd*, master and disciple, with the emperor as *pīr*.

It never numbered more than about nineteen adherents. Birbal is the one Hindu of note among them.

And here is the fact that tells us more about this order than any doctrine in it. **Rājā Man Singh — the emperor's foremost general, the man who had saved his throne at Lahore the year before — declined. So did Rājā Bhagwan Das.** They are not recorded as having suffered for it. Man Singh went on to govern Kabul, Bihar and Bengal and to command the empire's armies for another two decades.

A ruler at the height of his power invited his greatest soldier into his own spiritual following, was refused, and did nothing about it.

That is a functioning counterweight, and it took the form of a man saying no.

What the majority supplied for free

The plurality of this order came from a direction none of the previous cases had available, and it required no charter, no endowment and no institution.

Three quarters or more of Akbar's subjects were not Muslim, and their religious life ran on structures the state had not built and could not administer. Caste, lineage, temple, monastery, festival, pilgrimage, the authority of Brahmans in

one register and of ascetics and bhakti teachers in another, the Jain communities of Gujarat and Rajasthan with their own mercantile wealth, the Sikh *gurus* at Amritsar in the second generation of an institution the emperor had no purchase on whatever.

Not one of those was a grant. There was no *madad-i maʿāsh* to audit, no *ṣadr* to appoint, no *ijāza* to withhold, no chair to defund. **The emperor's whole apparatus for managing an interpretive class simply did not engage with most of the interpretive classes in his empire.**

This is a genuinely new configuration for the collection and it produces an unexpected result. The Hindu religious order was safer from Akbar than the Muslim one was, not because he favoured it but because he had no instruments that reached it — and his most conspicuously tolerant policies cost him nothing precisely because the alternative would have required building an apparatus he did not have.

Toleration was, among other things, the honest name for a limit.

The armed counterweight

Above that sat the settlement examined in Module 2, and it should be scored here for what it actually conferred.

The Rajput houses held their ancestral kingdoms hereditarily, kept their own troops, married into the imperial house on terms that included their women retaining their religion, and commanded imperial armies. Their bargain was with the emperor personally and it was very good.

Its limits should be stated too. Mewar under Rana Pratap refused the whole arrangement and fought — Haldighati in 1576 — and was reduced to the hills, its capital taken and its territory occupied. **The choice offered was submission on generous terms or war, and the generosity of the terms is not evidence that there was a third option.**

Still, the terms were real and they were kept, and a Rajput commander in 1582 could refuse his emperor's religion and remain his emperor's general. There is no equivalent in either of the preceding studies.

What the ʿulamāʾ retained

And the class the emperor had spent a decade reducing was not destroyed, which is the finding the preceding modules set up.

He could audit their grants; he did. He could exile their leaders; he did. He could stage their disagreements; he did. He could obtain their signatures; he did.

He could not stop a *qāḍī* in Jaunpur issuing a fatwa that rebellion against him was lawful, because the man's authority to issue it came from his teachers and not from the emperor, and there was no procedure by which it could be withdrawn. Akbar's answer was to have him killed, which is the answer available to any ruler with an army and is not the same as controlling an institution.

The class survived the reign, retained its licence, kept its chains of transmission intact, and produced within Akbar's own lifetime the movement that would undo his settlement — Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī of the Naqshbandī order, born in 1564, writing letters to the nobility from the 1590s, arguing that the emperor's innovations were an assault on the law and that the remedy lay in the nobles around the throne rather than in rebellion.

A class that can be starved, exiled and outvoted but not licensed is a class that waits.

The floor of the order

And then the accounting that every module of this kind must make, and which is bleakest here because the top of the structure is so generous.

The cultivator paid about a third of his crop, in cash, on a schedule fixed by a measurement he had no part in and an average of prices he had no access to, to a collector who was either the state's man or an assignee's. Between him and the state stood a hereditary *zamīndār* with his own share and his own armed retainers.

What could he do? He could take a case to a *qāḍī* whose law was not his own or to a caste and village authority whose reach stopped at the village. He could, in a bad year, claim the remission the regulations provided, if the officer allowed it. He could abscond, which is attested and which the state regarded as a problem to be prevented. He could join a rising, and when peasants did rise in this period they were suppressed.

The counterweights enumerated above — a general's right to refuse, a Rajput house's ancestral land, a scholar's untouchable licence, a Jain community's wealth, a temple's independence — required, every one of them, something he did not have: an army, a lineage, a licence, a treasury, or an institution.

The plurality of Akbar's empire was real, was unusual, and reached exactly as far down as property and organisation reached, which is not far.

Reading liberty against the framework

The first finding, and it is a third generator of plurality to set beside the two the collection already has. The Seljuk case found counterweights arising from the technical form of institutions — a personal licence, a private-law endowment — that nobody had authored. The Investiture case found counterweights bought in a bidding war between two authorities and dated to it.

This case supplies a third: **counterweights that exist because the ruler's administrative instruments are confessionally shaped and most of his subjects are outside their reach.**

That mechanism has a distinctive signature. It is *invisible in the archives*, because it consists of things the state did not do to people it had no procedure for. It is *not a concession*, and it cannot be withdrawn by the party that did not grant it. And it is *asymmetric in a peculiar direction*: it protects the majority community's institutions better than the ruler's own community's, because it is the ruler's own community whose religious establishment lives on his grants and holds offices in his gift.

A ruler is always most dangerous to the clergy of his own faith, because those are the only ones he has instruments for — and this is a general proposition worth carrying, since it inverts the expectation that a confessional state is hardest on the other confessions.

The second finding, on the durability of the refusal. Man Singh's refusal is the cleanest single demonstration in the collection of what a counterweight is: the ability to decline a ruler's request and go on holding one's position. It rested on nothing written. It rested on the fact that the emperor needed him more than he needed the emperor's discipleship, and that his ancestral kingdom was his own.

Which yields a test sharper than any charter: **ask what happens to the second most powerful man in an order when he refuses the first.** If he is destroyed, the order has no counterweights whatever the documents say. If he is not, it has one, and its extent is exactly the number of men who could do the same. In Akbar's empire that number was small, and it was not zero, and both facts matter.

A note on sources.

That Abu'l Fazl uses *Tawḥīd-i Ilāhī* rather than *Dīn-i Ilāhī*, and that the latter may not have been current in Akbar's lifetime, is argued in the modern scholarship and is reported as a live position. The absence of scripture, priesthood, place of worship and ritual beyond initiation, the four grades of devotion (property, life, honour, religion), the *pīr–murīd* form, and the figure of about nineteen adherents with Birbal as the sole Hindu of note are standard; the figure is conventional and is given as an order of magnitude. Britannica's summary that it functioned as a personality cult around Akbar's person is one reading among several and is not adopted here.

That Rājā Man Singh and Rājā Bhagwan Das declined membership and suffered no recorded consequence is standard and is the pivot of this module.

Haldighati (1576) and Mewar's continued resistance under Rana Pratap are standard, and are entered here to prevent the Rajput settlement being read as consensual throughout.

The absence of state instruments engaging Hindu, Jain and Sikh religious institutions is an inference from the administrative record rather than a statement any contemporary source makes; the study marks it as such. Mughal patronage of individual temples and of particular teachers existed and is not the same as an administrative apparatus.

Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī's dates (born 1564) and his method of writing to members of the nobility rather than preaching rebellion are standard; his role in the later reversal is treated in the module on collapse.

The peasant's position follows Module 6 and its sources. No figures are given for the incidence of flight or of agrarian revolt.

The proposition that a ruler is most dangerous to the clergy of his own faith because those are the only ones he has instruments for, and the test of what happens to the second man when he refuses the first, are this study's.

MODULE 10

HEREDITARY BY FARMAN

Module 10 · change and collapse — nineteen disciples and no successor, a son who had the historian murdered, and a great-grandson who undid the whole settlement by changing the terms of a land grant

What could not be inherited

Akbar died at Agra in October 1605, having reigned forty-nine years. He left the largest and best-administered state in the world of his day, a revenue system that would outlast the dynasty, a nobility recruited across four ethnic pools and two religions, and a settlement with the Rajput houses that had held through a civil war.

He also left a religious position that could not be transmitted, and the reason is written into its construction.

The doctrine was that a light descended on his person. The discipleship was a personal bond between a *pīr* and nineteen *murīds*. The *Mahzar* was an attestation by named men, several of them long dead, concerning his own penetrating wisdom and right judgement. **Every instrument of the religious settlement referred to Akbar the man, and none to the office of emperor.**

A doctrine of that shape has no mechanism of succession. His son either had the light or did not, and the only people who could say were the same household that had said it of his father.

Jahangir, who succeeded, did not attempt it. He retained the vocabulary of exalted kingship — the Mughal court kept *ṣulḥ-i kull* as a governing principle for another century — and quietly let the discipleship lapse. Shah Jahan restored a good deal of Islamic public form. The apparatus of debate was not rebuilt.

The thing that survived was the part that had been institutional, and the thing that vanished was the part that had been personal, which is exactly what the module on the robe predicted and is the clearest confirmation the study gets.

The murder

The transition was not smooth and its violence is instructive.

Prince Salīm, the future Jahangir, rebelled against his father in his last years, set up a rival court at Allahabad, and had coins struck in his own name. In 1602 he arranged the murder of Abu'l Fazl, who was returning from the Deccan; the killing was done by Bir Singh Deo Bundela, a chieftain of Orchha, who was afterwards rewarded with high rank when Salīm came to the throne.

Consider what that tells us. **The heir to the empire identified the architect of the religious settlement as his enemy, had him assassinated, and was neither disinherited nor punished** — Akbar grieved, and reconciled with his son, and the succession proceeded.

The man who had written the doctrine of the emperor's divine light was killed by the emperor's son with impunity. There is no better measure of how much of the settlement was Akbar's own and how little of it had become anybody else's.

Sirhindi

Meanwhile the class that had been audited was reorganising, and it did so in the one form no ruler in this civilisation could reach.

Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī, born in 1564, of the Naqshbandī order, spent the last years of Akbar's reign and the reign of Jahangir writing letters — the *Maktūbāt* — to nobles, officers and men of standing at court, arguing that the innovations of the age were an assault on the *sharīʿa* and that the remedy lay with the men around the throne.

Note the method, because it is the exact counter to everything Akbar had built. Akbar's instruments operated on grants, offices, patents and public assemblies. Sirhindī operated through **private correspondence with individuals**, in a network of teacher-disciple bonds, requiring no building, no endowment, no appointment and no licence from anybody. Jahangir imprisoned him for a year and then released and honoured him, which is roughly what happens when a state applies a coercive instrument to a network that has no address.

Whether Sirhindī's later influence has been overstated is debated among historians and the study takes no view. What is not in doubt is the form: **the counter-formation ran on exactly the property — a personal, uninspectable, unrevokable chain of authority — that had made the class impossible to capture in the first place.**

The reversal, and how it was done

Aurangzeb, who took the throne in 1658 after a war against his brothers, reversed the settlement. The usual account lists the doctrinal measures: the reimposition of *jizya* in 1679, after roughly a century's abatement; the compilation of the *Fatāwā-yi ʿĀlamgīrī* as a comprehensive statement of Ḥanafī law for the empire's courts; the withdrawal of court patronage from music and painting; the destruction of certain temples.

Those are real and they are the ones everyone cites. But the measure that actually undid Akbar's position was none of them.

In 1690 Aurangzeb issued a *farmān* making *aʾimma* lands — the *madad-i maʿāsh* grants — hereditary.

Read that against the second module of this study and the whole arc closes. The single lever Akbar had over the interpretive class, the lever that Nizām al-Mulk had lacked and the Latin reformers had fought a war to remove, was that the scholars' land grants were pensions for a life, renewable at the emperor's pleasure, auditable by his officers, forfeit if the patent were not produced. **Aurangzeb converted them into inheritances.**

At a stroke, the class became what the Islamic *ʿulamāʾ* had been under the Seljuks: personally licensed, so uncapturable; and permanently endowed, so unstarvable. The emperor kept the *jizya* and the *fatāwā* and the temple demolitions, and gave away the only instrument that had ever actually worked.

The counter-reformation was accomplished not by doctrine but by tenure.

What it cost him

And the reversal's price was paid in the currency Akbar's settlement had been designed to save.

The *jizya* of 1679 was opposed by Hindu rulers, by members of his own family, and by Mughal officials. The Rana of Mewar wrote a protest citing the precedent of its abolition. The Rajput alliance frayed; the Marathas rose; and the Deccan wars consumed the last twenty-six years of the reign and the empire's fiscal capacity.

The study will not claim that *jizya* caused the Mughal decline; the historiography on that is contested and the causes are many. What it will say is narrower and better evidenced. **The measure Akbar had abandoned to preserve a saving was reimposed, and the saving was lost** — the self-maintaining consent of a majority whose religion cost the state nothing became, over the following decades, something that had to be

held down.

That is the test the module on the cost column set up, and the answer it returns is that Akbar's toleration was both a conviction and the cheaper option, and that the century which chose the other option paid what the calculation had said it would.

Reading the collapse against the framework

The finding, and it is the study's central one. The parts of Akbar's settlement that survived were the parts vested in institutions and procedures — the revenue system, the *manṣab*, the Rajput incorporation, the vocabulary of universal conciliation. The parts that died with him were the parts vested in his person: the discipleship, the arbitral authority, the light.

A ruler who becomes his own source of title can only do it personally, and a personal authority is not transmissible. The doctrine of a light descending on a man cannot be conferred on his son, because the only evidence for it is the man's own conduct and the testimony of his own household. Nineteen disciples died out with their *pīr*. The *Maḥzar* was an attestation about Akbar's penetrating wisdom, not about the office he held, and no successor could inherit an assessment of somebody else's judgement.

That completes what the two preceding studies had left open. **The Seljuks bought a discretionary authorisation from an office that outlived every sultan who used it. Latin Christendom fought fifty years over an institutional credential that outlived both parties. Akbar generated his own and it lasted exactly as long as he breathed** — and the difference is not the quality of the man or the strength of the state, both of which favoured Akbar, but whether the authority was lodged in an office or in a person.

And the second finding, on how a settlement is actually reversed. Everyone remembers 1679 and nobody remembers 1690, and 1690 is the one that mattered. The *jizya* was a symbol and it cost the empire its Rajputs. The hereditary conversion of the scholars' grants was a piece of tenurial administration in a *farmān* and it permanently removed the state's only instrument over the men who held the law.

Look for a counter-reformation in the tenure provisions, not in the doctrinal proclamations. A ruler who wishes to restore a class's independence does not need to say so; he needs only to make its income permanent. And a study that reads the proclamations will record the wrong century as the turning point.

A note on sources.

Akbar's death in October 1605 after a reign of forty-nine years is standard. Salīm's rebellion, the rival court at Allahabad, and the murder of Abu'l Fazl on 22 August 1602 by Bir Singh Deo Bundela at Salīm's instigation, with Bir Singh's later elevation under Jahangir, are standard.

That the discipleship lapsed under Jahangir and that no successor attempted to reconstitute the arbitral position is standard; the retention of *ṣulḥ-i kull* as a governing principle at the Mughal court after Akbar is likewise standard.

Shaikh Aḥmad Sirhindī's dates, his *Maktūbāt*, his method of addressing members of the nobility, and his imprisonment and subsequent release and honouring under Jahangir are standard. Yohanan Friedmann's work is the point of reference for the debate over the extent of his influence on later policy, which is contested; the study takes no position on the extent and relies only on the form of his activity.

Aurangzeb's reign from 1658, the reimposition of *jizya* in 1679 after roughly a century's abatement, the compilation of the *Fatāwā-yi ʿĀlamgīrī*, and the withdrawal of patronage from certain arts are standard. The exemptions attached to the *jizya* — for Rajput and Maratha state officials, Brahmans, women, children, the elderly, the disabled, the unemployed and the ill, with waivers in regions struck by calamity — are as reported and are not detailed in the text above. Rana Raj Singh of Mewar's protest is standard.

Aurangzeb's *farmān* of 1690 making *a'imma* lands hereditary is documented in the administrative literature; the provisions concerning widows' and daughters' shares in the same *farmān* are noted there and are not relied on here. **The argument that this measure, rather than the doctrinal reversals, was the decisive undoing of Akbar's position over the interpretive class is this study's, and is offered as an interpretation to be tested rather than as a received finding.**

The causes of Mughal decline are contested across a large literature and no position is taken; the claim made here is limited to the loss of a specific fiscal and political saving.

MODULE 11

THIRTY THOUSAND AT CHITTOR

Module 11 · the grim accounting — a ledger whose two columns were written by the same hand in the same decade, and a record produced almost entirely by men on the payroll

The first column

Set down what came out of this reign, at the fullest valuation its defenders would give.

A subcontinental peace. From roughly 1570 to 1600 the greater part of northern India was under one government, with policed roads, a common currency, a standardised measure and a settled revenue demand. Whatever else is true, that is a very large quantity of ordinary human security, and its beneficiaries were mostly people who left no record of being grateful.

A revenue system. Measurement, classification, crop schedules, a cash demand fixed on ten-year local averages, remission in calamity. It outlasted the dynasty and shaped what the British inherited two centuries later.

A settlement with the majority. The pilgrim tax and the *jizya* gone; Rajput houses at the top of the imperial service with their ancestral kingdoms guaranteed and their women's religion untouched; a Hindu general commanding the imperial armies; a Hindu revenue minister designing the fiscal system. There is no European parallel in the same century and there is no earlier Indian Muslim parallel either.

The idea of *ṣulḥ-i kull*. A working doctrine that a sovereign stands above the confessional disputes of his subjects, held and acted on for four decades, at a moment when the alternative was universally practised everywhere else.

And a body of translation and enquiry. The *Mahābhārata*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the Gospels and much else into Persian; the rational sciences in the curriculum; a hall in which a Jain teacher, a Zoroastrian priest and a Jesuit argued in front of an emperor who could not read.

The second column

Now the other side, entered in the same voice.

Chittor, 1568. After a four-month siege and the *jauhar*, a general massacre of the surviving population, reported at thirty thousand. It was ordered, it was on that scale,

and it was proclaimed afterwards as a victory over infidels. The man who commissioned the *Razmnāma* did that first.

The conquests generally. Malwa, Gujarat, Bengal, Kashmir, Sind, the Deccan — every one taken by armies living off the country, and several of them taken more than once because they rose again.

The peasant's third. The most sophisticated revenue system in the world was a system for taking about a third of a crop in cash from people with no voice in the assessment, and the *karorī* experiment of the mid-1570s produced enough oppression to require an investigation and the punishment of its own officers.

The *'ulamā'*. Grants resumed, scholars made to travel with their patents, two chief scholars exiled under colour of pilgrimage and one of them strangled in a prison, two provincial judges executed for issuing rulings.

Famine. The subcontinent in this period suffered periodic subsistence crises, notably in Gujarat in the mid-1570s; the state's relief capacity was limited and its revenue demand was fixed in cash.

And the Deccan, begun in 1595, which occupied the last decade of the reign and every decade after it, and which drained the empire for a century.

The two columns are one hand

The observation this module exists to make is that the columns are not independent.

The revenue system that measured every *bīgha* is the same apparatus that summoned scholars with their patents. The administrative capacity that could brand every horse in the army is the same capacity that made the *madad-i maʿāsh* audit possible, and the branding produced the rebellion of 1580. The Rajput incorporation that gave India its most successful example of confessional accommodation was purchased in part at Chittor, where the price of refusing was demonstrated. The peace that let caravans move was made by armies.

Akbar's tolerance and Akbar's ruthlessness were not two aspects of a complicated man. They were one policy, in which the terms offered were unusually generous and the consequence of refusing them was a massacre, and the generosity was credible precisely because the consequence was.

That is not a debunking. A settlement in which submission is genuinely rewarded and resistance is genuinely destroyed is a functioning settlement and it is better for most people than one in which submission is not rewarded. It is an argument against reading the reward without the alternative.

Why the record leans

And the source position here is the most one-sided of the three studies in this sequence.

Nearly everything we know about this reign was written by men on the imperial payroll, in Persian, at or near the court. Abu'l Fazl was the emperor's closest counsellor and wrote at his command. Niẓām al-Dīn Aḥmad was an imperial officer. **Even Badauni, the great hostile witness, held a *madad-i maʿāsh* grant and worked in the translation bureau** — his dissent is the dissent of a disappointed insider, not of an outsider, and its subject is the emperor's religious deviation rather than anything about the governed.

There is almost nothing from the other direction. The Jesuits are independent and are three Europeans with a conversion agenda. Jain and Sanskrit sources exist and are patchy for these questions. **From the peasants who paid the third, from the population of Chittor, from the women of the *jauhar*, from a Gujarat village in a famine year — nothing.**

So the record of this reign is a debate between two courtiers about whether their emperor was a good Muslim, conducted in a vocabulary in which the majority of his subjects do not appear as agents at all. **The most famous quarrel in Mughal historiography is a quarrel about the ruler's soul, and both parties to it were fed by him.**

Reading the accounting against the framework

The finding, which sharpens what the two preceding studies produced. The Seljuk case found a record biased toward the classes that recorded in durable materials. The Investiture case found a record produced by the combatants as a phase of the fighting. This case supplies a third and narrower bias.

Where a regime is the sole significant patron of literate production, even its opposition is internal, and the debate that survives is a debate about the ruler rather than about the ruled. Badauni looks like the corrective to Abu'l Fazl and is in fact his complement: the two disagree about everything except the frame, which is that the important question of the age is what the emperor believed. Neither asks what the settlement did to anybody.

The consequence for method is specific. **A historian who balances the official source against the hostile source has not escaped the bias if both sources are inside the same establishment; he has only averaged it.** The test is whether the two disputants disagree about the subject or only about the verdict — and here they agree entirely about the subject.

And the second finding, on how to enter a settlement's generosity. Every account of Akbar rests on the toleration and most mention Chittor in a different chapter. They belong in the same sentence.

Where a conqueror's terms are generous and the penalty for refusing them is annihilation, the generosity and the annihilation are one instrument, and pricing them separately produces a false total in both directions — flattering the regime by detaching the reward from the threat, and misjudging its critics by treating the threat as evidence that the reward was insincere. It was not insincere. It was enforced.

A note on sources.

The figures in this module are given as reported and none is verified. The thirty thousand at Chittor is a conventional chronicle figure reported across the sources including Mughal ones and is an order of magnitude, not a count. No figures are given for the yield of the land revenue, for populations, for famine mortality, or for casualties in any campaign, because the material does not support them.

Chittor (1567–68) and its aftermath are treated with their sources in Module 1; the revenue system and the *karorī* experiment in Module 6; the *madad-i maʿāsh* audit and the fate of the two chief scholars in Modules 2 and 5; the executions of the *qāḍī*s of Jaunpur and Bengal in Module 8.

The Gujarat subsistence crisis of the mid-1570s is standard. The Deccan campaigns from 1595 and their continuation under Akbar's successors are standard.

The translations of the *Mahābhārata* as the *Razmnāma* and of other works, and the curricular reforms, are treated in Module 4. That Akbar was illiterate, or at least never learned to read, is the standard account and is not disputed in the sources.

Badauni's position as a *madad-i maʿāsh* holder employed in the translation bureau is standard and is the basis of the argument that his dissent is an insider's. The observation that the surviving debate is conducted entirely within the establishment, and that both parties share the frame while differing on the verdict, is this study's.

MODULE 12

THE THIRD ANSWER

Module 12 · convergence and divergence — three rulers in three civilisations facing one problem, the two levers that separate their answers, and the strongest case for Akbar, stated fully and answered

One problem, three answers

A ruler holds force. Force compels and cannot make obedience owed. Somewhere in every order there must be a party who can declare that obedience *is* owed — and whose declaration is worth having only because the ruler could not have produced it himself.

Three rulers, in three civilisations, met that problem and answered it three different ways. The three studies in this sequence are the three answers.

Tughril and Nizām al-Mulk bought one. There was a caliph in Baghdad, powerless, blinded twice within living memory, living on a stipend a general could stop — and precisely because he had nothing, his signature could not be suspected of self-interest and could not be produced by any competitor. The Seljuks spent twenty-five years, a war and a hundred thousand dinars obtaining it, married into his house, took him into custody, and never once tried to acquire the office, because acquiring it would have destroyed what they were buying.

Gregory VII and Henry IV fought over one. The Latin credential was institutional: a priest made by a bishop, a bishop by bishops, in a hierarchy the reform was establishing ran through Rome. Whoever controlled the making of bishops controlled the church, and both parties saw it, and the war lasted fifty years, produced an antipope, a sacked Rome and a pope dead in exile, and ended by inventing a distinction that made a bishopric two things.

Akbar generated one. There was no caliph within reach, the *'ulamā'* were a class and not an office, and most of his subjects held no doctrine in which any Islamic authorisation meant anything. So he built a doctrine that required no conferrer — a light descending directly on his person — and when that proved insufficient he obtained a document in which the scholars themselves declared his judgement binding.

Two levers

The three cases separate on two variables, and neither could have been isolated from one case alone.

Where the credential lives. In an office, or in a person.

Latin ordination lives in an office. Therefore the Latin church could be captured — and was, by princes, in the sixteenth century — and could be organised, and could speak with one voice, and was worth fifty years of war. The Islamic *ijāza* lives in a person: one named master to one named student, on no formal criteria, by a grant nobody can compel. Therefore the *'ulamā'* could not be captured at any price, in Isfahan or in Fatehpur Sikri, and equally could not be organised, could not speak with one voice, and could not be committed by their own leaders' signatures — which is why seven scholars signing at Fatehpur Sikri had no purchase on the eighth in Jaunpur, and why no Islamic polity ever produced a Concordat of Worms.

Where the funding lives. In a perpetual private endowment, or in a state grant with a term.

The Seljuk *waqf* was created by private founders, alienated in perpetuity, its terms fixed in a deed. Nizām al-Mulk could not starve the class he was funding. The Mughal *madad-i maʿāsh* was a state pension in the form of land revenue, granted for a life, renewable at the pleasure of an imperial officer. **Akbar could starve them, and did, and that is the whole difference between the two Islamic cases.**

Set the levers in a table and the three answers fall out of it. Nizām al-Mulk could neither license nor starve, and got a magnificently funded class that ignored him. Gregory and Henry could both license, in principle, which is why they fought. Akbar could not license and could starve, and got a class that signed what he put in front of them and declared war on him the moment his back was turned.

And the third finding, which only the Mughal case supplies: there is a lever that operates on neither. An interpretive class whose credential cannot be inspected derives its authority from an assumption that its holders know. That assumption survives private disagreement and does not survive eight years of Thursday evenings at which they disagree in front of the court. **Publicity is the attack available against a personal credential**, and it is cheaper than either of the others.

The thing none of them could do

And the finding all three converge on, which is the sequence's central result.

There is no self-authorising position.

Akbar is the proof, because he had every advantage that would have been needed. No external authority existed to contradict him. He had the largest army in the world, an administration that could count every horse in it, a court theologian supplying a doctrine of divine radiance and a poet laureate to versify it. He had already mounted the pulpit and read the sermon himself.

And when he needed the thing to be established rather than merely asserted, he went to the class he was in the process of breaking and had them write it down, in their own legal form, in the first person plural: *we do hereby agree that such a decree shall be binding on us all.*

He could compel that signature. That is what the audit had been for. **And compelling it destroyed most of its value, which is why a provincial judge could overturn it within nine months.**

That is not a mistake Akbar made. It is a contradiction in the position, and it is the same contradiction from the other side that made Gregory unable to refuse absolution at Canossa. **The instrument works because it might have gone the other way. A ruler who removes the possibility of refusal has removed the thing he was buying.**

The strongest case for him

Stated as its best advocate would state it.

You have written a study about what Akbar could not do. Consider what he did.

He inherited a boy's claim to a kingdom his father had lost, in a country where Muslim dynasties had ruled a non-Muslim population for three centuries by the only method anyone had ever used, which was to treat the majority as a tolerated inferior category paying for the privilege. He abolished the tax that said so. He put the men of that majority into the highest commands of his army and the design of his revenue system, guaranteed their ancestral kingdoms, and married into their houses on terms that left their women's religion untouched. He built a hall where a Jain and a Jesuit and a Zoroastrian could argue in front of him. He had the Mahābhārata translated into the language of his court.

And he was right about the thing that mattered. The scholars who claimed exclusive authority over the law could not agree with each other, took bribes over land grants, transferred property to their wives to dodge the alms-tax, and — when their incomes were audited — declared rebellion against their sovereign to be lawful. A state cannot be run on a law whose custodians produce four answers and then take the field against you. Somebody has to decide, and he arranged for it to be himself, and he did it not by decree but by asking them, and they agreed.

He gave northern India thirty years of peace, a revenue system that outlasted his dynasty, and the only serious attempt anyone made before the modern era to build a state above confession rather than on one. Measure him against his contemporaries — against a Europe burning people over the same decades — and not against a standard nobody has ever met.

The answer

Most of that is true and each part needs its own answer.

The settlement with the majority was real, was unprecedented in its context, and worked. Concede it without qualification; it is the strongest thing in the case and the study has spent twelve modules confirming the mechanism by which it worked.

But it cost him nothing that he had, and it was the cheaper option as well as the better one. He gave up a modest revenue and preserved an enormous saving: a population that maintained its own religion at no charge to the state, provided he did not attack it. Collecting the *jizya* would have required an apparatus, generated resistance and converted a self-maintaining majority into a policed one. That does not make the policy insincere. It means the test of conviction is what happens when the arithmetic changes, and the answer to that test came in 1679 from a great-grandson who reimposed the tax and lost the Rajputs.

The generosity and the massacre are one instrument. Chittor was 1568; the terms offered to every other Rajput house afterwards were credible because of it. Pricing the reward without the alternative flatters the regime.

The scholars were right that he was attacking them and wrong about why. They said it was apostasy. The *qāḍī* of Bengal, more honestly, said it was the land grants — and he was giving an accurate account of the causation in his own idiom. Akbar's instrument against the *'ulamā'* was never a doctrine. It was a survey, a ceiling, and a summons to bring your patent in person.

And the thing he is most admired for was the thing he could least transmit. The nineteen disciples died with their *pīr*. The *Mahzar* attested to *his* penetrating wisdom, not to an office. The light descended on a man, and a light that descends on a man cannot be conferred on his son. His heir had the architect of the whole doctrine murdered on the road from the Deccan and was neither disinherited nor punished.

Now the concession, which should be the last thing said.

Akbar saw the problem more clearly than anyone else in this sequence. The Seljuks kept a caliph in custody for a century and a half and never asked what the office was for. The Latin west fought fifty years without either party quite formulating what made an authorisation valuable. Akbar understood that he needed somebody who was

not himself to say it, understood that no such somebody existed, and set about manufacturing one — first by staging his opponents' disagreement until their claim to decide had collapsed, then by taking their signatures while they still had the standing to be worth having.

It was the correct analysis and the correct sequence, and it failed for the one reason it had to. The signature he obtained was worth having only if it could have been withheld, and by the time he obtained it he had spent five years making sure it could not be. He knew what he needed. He could not get it, because getting it required leaving intact the very independence that had made the problem in the first place.

Which is the sequence's final result, and it holds across three civilisations: the authority a ruler most needs is the one he is least able to arrange for, and any measure that makes it easier to obtain makes it less worth obtaining. The Seljuks got it by leaving the office alone for two hundred years. Henry IV got it by standing barefoot in the snow and satisfying the instrument's own terms. Akbar got a piece of paper, and the paper was true for as long as the men who signed it were afraid, and no longer.

A note on sources.

The comparisons in this module rest on the two preceding studies in this series — *The Seljuks and the Abbasid Caliphate* and *The Investiture Contest* — and on the evidence set out in their modules; where facts about those cases are stated here without citation they are documented there.

The contrast between the personal *ijāza* and institutional ordination follows George Makdisi's account of the former and the standard account of the latter. The contrast between the *waqf* and the *madad-i maʿāsh* grant follows the standard administrative literature on both, and the proposition that licence-form and funding-form are independent variables producing four distinct positions is this study's, offered to be tested against further cases.

The proposition that publicity is the attack available against a personal credential is this study's and is developed in Module 4. The proposition that there is no self-authorising position, and that any measure making an authorisation easier to obtain makes it less worth obtaining, is the sequence's cumulative result, drawing on the Canossa material in the second study and the *Mahzar* material in this one.

The counter-position in this module is composed, not quoted. It is an attempt to state the case for Akbar as his best advocate would state it, drawing on claims that appear across the historiography rather than on any single author, and it is answered point by point rather than dismissed.

A structural parallel between a caliphal investiture, a papal absolution and a *maḥẓar* should not be pressed into an identity: they are three different instruments in three legal traditions, they decay differently, and they are vulnerable to different attacks — which is precisely what the two-lever analysis above is for.

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